

Politicising stardom: Jane Fonda, IPC Films and Hollywood, 1977-1982

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**Politicising Stardom: Jane Fonda, IPC Films
and Hollywood, 1977-1982**

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**Thesis submitted for the qualification of
Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)**

Abstract

This thesis is an empirical analysis of Jane Fonda's films, stardom, and political activism during the most commercially successful period of her career. At the outset, Fonda's early stardom is situated in relation to contemporaneous moral and political ideologies in the United States and how she functioned as both an agent and symbol of these ideologies. Her anti-war activism in the early-1970s constituted the apex of Fonda's radicalisation and the nadir of her popular appeal; a central question of this thesis, therefore, is how her stardom was rehabilitated for the American mainstream to the point of becoming Hollywood's most bankable actress.

As the star and producer of IPC Films, Fonda developed political projects using commercial formats, namely *Coming Home* (1978), *The China Syndrome* (1979), *Nine to Five* (1980), and *Rollover* (1981). The final IPC film, *On Golden Pond* (1981), signalled an ideological breach in this political strategy by favouring a familial spectacle, and duly outperformed its predecessors significantly. The first and last chapters of this work provide historical parameters for IPC in Fonda's career, while the remaining chapters are structured by the conceptual and political aspects of each IPC project. *Julia* (1977) is discussed as an IPC prototype through its dramatisation of political consciousness. *Coming Home*, *The China Syndrome*, *Nine to Five*, and *Rollover* all exhibit this motif whereas *On Golden Pond* employs melodramatic nostalgia. Often discussed reductively as a star symbolising change, this thesis instead uses archival and published sources to analyse Fonda's individual agency in historical context, as well as the cultural and political impact of her stardom. The IPC enterprise provided cinematic apparatus for Fonda's political recuperation within the American mainstream, which, more broadly, harboured significance for the nation's conservative resurgence at the end of the 1970s.

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Introduction

‘Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed. Much of the ideological investment of the star phenomenon is in the stars seen as individuals, their qualities seen as natural.’

Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 17-18.

‘It may be more important to accept the viewing assumptions of narrative realism in order to be better able to change the dominant figures of thought, value, and action that are the substance of society.’

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner,
Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 268.

‘During the 1970s and early 1980s, Americans concluded that capitalist accumulation was not the enemy of doing good but the vehicle for it.’

Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society and Politics* (New York: The New Press, 2001), p. 257.

Scope and aims: Fonda and American national identity

Jane Fonda's stardom denotes numerous values for historians of culture, politics, and Hollywood cinema alike, yet as an historical figure in her own right – beyond functioning as a 'symbol' of these histories – Fonda has received relatively less scholarly attention.¹ This thesis is an empirical study of Fonda's stardom and political activism, and focuses particularly on the feature films developed through her production company, IPC.² Fonda's role as both producer and star in the filmmaking process is analysed using extensive published sources and recently released archival papers from holdings in London and Los Angeles. This, combined with her forthrightness in constructing a nationwide media presence palatable to the American mainstream, highlights neglected issues of individual agency in relation to her cultural, political, and cinematic identities. Fonda wielded remarkable creative and political influence over the films she produced through IPC while also securing her greatest box office successes; these feats were achieved during a period of American history otherwise synonymous with conservative political progress, epitomised by Ronald Reagan's landslide presidential election in 1980. Although juxtaposing these phenomena ostensibly reveals an anomalous episode, or suggests Fonda's success railed against popular sentiment given her openly leftist politics, a correlation nonetheless existed with political implications for both nation and star. As a cinematic enterprise, IPC Films fused commercial form with political content in order for Fonda

¹ Fonda receives mention, albeit cursory in some cases, in such diverse titles as David Thomson, *The Whole Equation: A History of Hollywood* (London: Little Brown, 2004); Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (eds.), *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Paul Alexander, *The Candidate: Behind John Kerry's Remarkable Run for the White House* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004); this range of subjects alludes to her various identities as a Hollywood star, cultural icon, and American political figure.

² These include *Coming Home* (1978), *The China Syndrome* (1979), and *Nine to Five* (1980). IPC stood for 'Indochina Peace Campaign', an activist syndicate, but the acronym was used predominantly.

to play ‘everyday’ characters who reach ideological enlightenment; in historical context, Fonda delimited and recuperated mainstream notions of politicisation in the wake of the social upheaval generated by Watergate and Vietnam.

As one of the most visible and complex Hollywood stars of the post-war period, Fonda has attracted the interests of manifold biographers and scores of journalists. Her first full length biography was published in 1973; a host of others have followed, meaning that accounts of Fonda’s life and career have recurred in consecutive decades.³ The early-1980s represent the high watermark for both the number of publications and, indeed, the reverence with which Fonda is depicted as a major star and political activist. Each title alone encapsulates this trend: *Jane Fonda: All American Anti-Heroine* (1980), *Jane Fonda: The Actress in Her Time* (1982), and *Jane Fonda: Heroine for Our Time* (1982) all imply Fonda’s relationship with American society is historically significant.⁴ While biographies in and of themselves are not the criterion for ascertaining the ‘historical significance’ of a star, the fact that Fonda’s life story has undergone retelling on so many occasions (as well as exhibiting subtle changes over time) suggests that, at the very least, a folklore has endured regarding her identity. Fonda’s biographical journey has ostensibly embodied and transcended pivotal historical episodes (America’s anti-war movement; the sexual revolution), making her a figure of perpetual media scrutiny and raising complex questions of shifting American ideologies. This is exemplified by a cover feature of *American Heritage* magazine from 2001 (fig. 1), which depicts Fonda in character as

³ Thomas Kiernan, *Jane: An Intimate Biography of Jane Fonda* (New York: Putnam, 1973). Other selected examples include Michael Freedland, *Jane Fonda: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988); Christopher Andersen, *Citizen Jane: The Turbulent Life of Jane Fonda* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1990); Sean French, *Jane Fonda: A Biography* (London: Pavilion, 1997).

⁴ Gary Herman and David Downing, *Jane Fonda: All American Anti-Heroine* (New York: Quick Fox, 1980); Fred Lawrence Guiles, *Jane Fonda: The Actress in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1982); Thomas Kiernan, *Jane Fonda: Heroine for Our Time* (New York: Delilah Communications, 1982).

Barbarella alongside a contemporaneous photograph, with the headline ‘Ms America: Why Jane Fonda is a Mirror of the Nation’s Past 40 Years’. The implication here is that Fonda’s personal and political trajectory from the sexual movement of the late-1960s to the turn of the twenty first century has been a tumultuous journey fraught with the transformative dynamics of history. Whereas Fonda has undoubtedly embodied associations of change, division, and contradiction at various junctures, she has also functioned as a recuperative force, which this thesis explores in relation to concepts of American national identity during the 1970s and 1980s.

Born to Henry Fonda and socialite Frances Brokaw in 1937, Jane Fonda made her Hollywood debut in 1960 and her stardom immediately thereafter was associated with a curious combination of sexual appeal and dynastic inheritance.⁵ Richard Dyer, whose work will be discussed more closely later in this introduction, positions Fonda’s father and sexual appeal as cornerstones of her stardom, to which he adds the headings ‘acting’ and ‘politics’, topics that arguably apply later in her career.⁶ For the purposes of summarising Fonda’s stardom as it leads into the core years of this thesis, four temporal categories are used in this introduction into which her film career can be grouped.⁷ Firstly, Fonda’s ‘emerging years’ commenced with *Tall Story* (1960), a middling high school comedy, which was followed by a trio of supporting parts gesturing toward bluntly conceived female sexual identities. *Walk on the Wild Side* (1962) featured Fonda as a Depression-era prostitute, in *The Chapman Report* (1962)

⁵ The temporal parameters encompass Fonda’s thirty year film career up to her initial retirement in 1990, with a specific focus on Fonda’s re-engineered persona after Watergate and Vietnam. A measure of biographical detail is required herein to elucidate the contextual mix of Hollywood stardom and American history under scrutiny within this thesis.

⁶ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979), pp. 72-98, esp. 77-88.

⁷ Chapter 1 of this thesis offers a broader account of Fonda’s early career through to 1977 with particular reference to how her stardom intersected with contemporaneous notions of American morals and politics.



Figure 1. *American Heritage* (July/August 2001).

she played a frigid widow, and in *Period of Adjustment* (1962), based on Tennessee Williams' comedy, Fonda appeared as a neurotic newlywed. Parallel projects in comedic and dramatic genres followed with *Sunday in New York* (1963), a farce in which Fonda's character debates whether to lose her virginity before marriage, and *In the Cool of the Day* (1963), a melodrama featuring Fonda as Peter Finch's doomed mistress. While none of the films made during these 'emerging years' resulted in any notable critical successes or commercial triumphs, the sexual tropes of the above characterisations were borne out and developed through her simultaneous screen careers in both France and the United States.

During the mid to late-1960s, Fonda furnished a Hollywood career whilst residing near to Paris in order to make French films also, a career choice consolidated by her marriage to the New Wave director, Roger Vadim. This period is categorised as ‘parallel identities’ given that Fonda’s stardom existed across industries and cultures yet remained punctuated by sexually charged characters, especially in the French films *Joy House* (1964), *Circle of Love* (1964), *The Game is Over* (1966) and *Spirits of the Dead* (1968).⁸ In Hollywood, Fonda’s films were less overtly risqué, yet still channelled sexual energy into her roles as a carefree mistress in *Any Wednesday* (1966) and a hedonistic newlywed in *Barefoot in the Park* (1967), both adaptations of Broadway comedies. As well as breaking into westerns – albeit irreverently – with the parodic *Cat Ballou* (1965), Fonda featured in Deep South melodramas *The Chase* (1966) and *Hurry Sundown* (1967); notably, Dyer has categorised Deep South melodramas as ‘a genre particularly given to “hysterical”, “nymphomaniacal” portraits of women’.⁹ It is fitting, then, that the apex of Fonda’s ‘parallel identities’ is heralded by *Barbarella* (1968); the first English language film of Roger Vadim, *Barbarella* effectively drew from Fonda’s sexual stardom as it has been constructed in Hollywood and France and transposed it into an exaggerated, comic-strip future, in which sexual pleasure is an overt cultural activity. Moreover, the sexual themes and content of the film were exaggerated enough to suggest these devices had become an exhausted means for the development of Fonda’s stardom; in an American context these tested the moral boundaries of being Henry Fonda’s daughter and alluded to contemporaneous generational differences at large in the 1960s, which carried over into the 1970s within a political context.

⁸ The titles are listed here as they were released for the American market. Aside from *The Joy House*, Vadim directed all of part of the remaining films (*Spirits of the Dead* being directed in three parts by Vadim, Louis Malle, and Fellini). This contextualises his Svengali role in her career, which is debated further in chapter 1.

⁹ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 83.

Upon returning to America in the late-1960s, Fonda went through a process of radicalisation; this infamous episode of political activity climaxed with her July 1972 visit to North Vietnam behind enemy lines. Fonda recounts in her 2005 autobiography how watching television footage of Vietnam during 1968, her last year in France, alongside other factors, compelled her to return with an altered consciousness: ‘The psychological impact of such images was devastating. Everything was turned upside down. Who was strong? What did “military might” mean? *Who were we as Americans?* [original emphasis]’¹⁰ Ironically, the accompanying transformations in Fonda’s physical appearance and political beliefs led the watching media to question what kind of an American *she* had become, having abandoned the role of a sex symbol for that of anti-war activist; this image change has hitherto remained an impasse in her popular identity.¹¹ Professionally, Fonda also made two films categorised here as ‘radical stardom’, which commenced with *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* (1969), Sydney Pollack’s Depression-set tale of marathon dancers competing for a prize that doesn’t exist. Securing Fonda a Best Actress Academy Award nomination, *They Shoot Horses* marked her out as a major talent and as one of the principal actresses of the New Hollywood cycle, a period she would further contribute to through IPC Films.¹² As brazenly as *Barbarella* epitomised Fonda’s sex symbol years, the 1971 thriller *Klute* was – and remains – the touchstone of Fonda’s profound impact as an actress; *Klute* proved that a radicalised star could

¹⁰ Jane Fonda, *My Life So Far* (London: Ebury Press, 2005), p. 193. Along with leaving France, Fonda also separated from Vadim not long into her radical period.

¹¹ Put crudely, Fonda transformed from *Barbarella* to ‘Hanoi Jane’, the implications of which are explored at some length in chapters 1 and 3.

¹² Although a commonly used term, the temporal parameters and meaning of New Hollywood continue to be debated by film scholars and Americanists alike. For a useful article exploring history and implications of New Hollywood, see Peter Krämer, ‘Post-classical Hollywood’, in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds.), *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 289-309. My use of the term is aligned with Robin Wood’s work on the period; see Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

also achieve mainstream success as a skilled performer when Fonda received a host of accolades, including a Best Actress Academy Award.¹³ Constituting the peak of Fonda's 'radical stardom', the Oscar success in April 1972 was thereafter overshadowed by Fonda's notoriety as a political figure, signalled when she embarked on a fact finding trip to North Vietnam that same summer.

Fonda's time in North Vietnam was widely publicised. Photographs of her trip and the radio broadcasts she made on Radio Hanoi, urging American servicemen to consider the implications of their actions, initiated many of the mythologies which right-wing 'Hanoi Jane' hate campaigns have hitherto used as a political fountainhead. Indeed, as historian Rick Perlstein writes in *Nixonland*, his epic account of Nixon's rise and fall:

The actress's trip marked the emergence of a new narrative about Vietnam: that people like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon weren't responsible for the disaster, but people like Fonda, stabbing America's soldiers and South Vietnamese allies in the back, were. It was the most convenient possible development for Richard Nixon – who was, exactly then, planning to stab America's soldiers and South Vietnamese allies in the back.¹⁴

¹³ While Fonda had received Golden Globe nominations for *Period of Adjustment*, *Cat Ballou*, and *Any Wednesday*, as well as winning a best newcomer Golden Globe in 1962, this recognition did not translate into media attention based around these successes; rather, as discussed, Fonda's stardom attracted profiles focusing on dynastic and/or sexual/moral discourse. Furthermore, the Oscar remained the gold standard by which acting success was judged and it is questionable whether in the 1960s the Golden Globes had the prestige that they now currently enjoy.

¹⁴ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), p. 707. Fonda's status as a single woman (having separated from Vadim and not yet married the New Left radical, Tom Hayden, at this point) exacerbated her function as a conservative hate figure given the concomitant rise of the women's movement, which she had vocally aligned herself with.

The state of Fonda's screen career after 1972 bears out Perlstein's allusion that she broke Nixon's fall regarding Vietnam, albeit in the brief period before Watergate unravelled. Having starred in *Tout Va Bien* (1972) with Yves Montand, a political feature film directed by Jean-Luc Godard depicting a wildcat strike in a sausage factory and thus a distinctly non-commercial venture, Fonda's subsequent projects were similarly marginalised. In a final set of films using the category 'grey-listed', Fonda embarked on the least mainstream period of her film career. Firstly, Fonda bankrolled two documentaries; *F.T.A.* (1972, standing for Free the Army) recorded the exploits of a left-wing theatre troupe she and Donald Sutherland, her co-star in *Klute*, had formed as an alternative to Bob Hope's shows for American servicemen. Two years later, *Introduction to the Enemy* (1974), filmed in Vietnam by Haskell Wexler, followed up Fonda's original trip with this second visit aimed at giving the North Vietnamese a human face. Nestled between these documentaries were two feature films; *Steelyard Blues* (1973) was a low-budget counter-cultural comedy starring Fonda and Sutherland once more, but *Steelyard Blues* failed both critically and commercially. Also in 1973, Fonda starred as Nora in *A Doll's House* under the direction of blacklisted director Joseph Losey, yet the picture failed to secure a distributor in the United States. These were ostensibly hard times for an Oscar-winning actress and raise the question of whether Fonda chose to shun Hollywood or vice-versa.

The inverse proportionality between Fonda and Nixon as political hate figures alluded to in Perlstein's Vietnam summary is especially useful when reversed in the context of Watergate. Specifically, with Fonda installed as a celebrity figurehead of anti-war activism – consolidated by her 1973 marriage to New Left radical Tom

Hayden – her actions in Vietnam provided shorthand for vilifying the anti-war movement; in turn, Nixon's downfall over the course of 1974 conversely led Fonda and her flailing career toward a vindictory light at the moment she found herself on the fringes of Hollywood.¹⁵ Whether Fonda jumped or was pushed from the mainstream spotlight remains an ambiguous issue, yet the fact that she asserted the existence of a Nixonian campaign against her in the dying days of his presidency is explored at various points in this thesis, situating the broader notion that to be an enemy of Nixon after Watergate was to be an ally of America in the mid to late-1970s. A major question of this work is how Fonda's image recuperated from that of Hanoi Jane to becoming Hollywood's most bankable female star within the same decade.¹⁶ In this, momentous events like the Watergate crisis tipped the balance, allowing the issues of individual agency exemplified by Fonda's control of IPC Films to bear the marks of history.

Historiography: key texts and approaches

This thesis occupies two realms of academia with regard to the scope, methods and sources employed in constructing an argument. These fields, namely Film Studies and American history, have been reconciled using the conceptual framework of star studies, an avenue of Film Studies that has hitherto received relatively less attention in comparison to *auteur* theory scholarship, for example. Furthermore, the use of

¹⁵ The closest Fonda came to a Hollywood film before her calculated return to the industry in 1977 was *The Blue Bird* (1976), a US-Soviet co-production that generated negligible press coverage and commercial activity.

¹⁶ David Cook reveals that Fonda was amongst the top 10 of Hollywood's most bankable stars by 1978, placed eighth behind Diane Keaton, the only actress ranking above her. By 1979, Fonda ranked sixth overall, making her the most bankable female star, an achievement that continued into the early-1980s. David Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 339.

archival primary sources raises questions in relation to the study of film history, a discipline simultaneously connected to and yet distinct from more ‘conventional’ narrative history. Representative secondary sources in the field of star studies will be discussed herein, along with how this thesis draws on particular elements of the discipline, before a subsequent contextual section on the sources and methods of film history.

Richard Dyer’s seminal texts, *Stars* and *Heavenly Bodies* have proven touchstones for any historian attempting to engage critically with Hollywood stardom. Dyer’s work reveals from the outset that the study of stars has derived from two perspectives exhibiting distinct sociological and semiotic dimensions, yet declares his objectives are dialectical in nature by moving between these elements, and thus between theoretical and empirical modes of study.¹⁷ One of Dyer’s central questions is how stardom functions as ideological apparatus and the issues this raises; because ‘ideology’ is a potentially complex set of ideas, it is worth noting Dyer’s concise definition of the term: ‘Ideology is the set of ideas and representations in which people collectively make sense of the world and the society in which they live. [...] Ideology is a characteristic of all human societies, but a given ideology is specific to a particular culture at a particular moment in history.’¹⁸ The ‘particular culture’ and ‘particular moment in history’ of this thesis are America during the mid-1970s to the early-1980s, a period across and between two consecutive decades that evoke discrete associations in relation to politics, culture, and – therefore – ideologies.¹⁹ Likewise,

¹⁷ Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁹ The 1970s have generated an emerging body of historical scholarship defined according to its fixed temporal parameters, as has occurred with previous decades. See, for example, Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). An equivalent cycle is emerging with the 1980s as its focus, an example of

Fonda was a ubiquitous figure in both the 1970s and 1980s for markedly different reasons; her enduring image during the 1970s was that of a radical activist whereas in the 1980s she accumulated associations with consumerism and fitness culture. Analysing the evolution of Fonda's identity (and, crucially, her own hand in this process) thus harbours the prospect of elucidating this disparity and in a broader sense decoding the transitional mechanisms operating between ostensibly 'oppositional' cultural and political periods. As Dyer argues in *Heavenly Bodies*, 'Stars matter because they act out aspects of life that matter to us; and performers get to be stars when they act out matters to enough people.'²⁰ In this regard, Fonda's prominent associations with American political issues were achieved through her status as a star that 'mattered' to American society. Whereas Dyer's propositions encourage analysis of a star's symbolic function for society, this thesis proposes analyses of Fonda, her films, and her politics that account for how she functioned as both a symbol and an architect of the political causes she sought to represent, and what significance this had, in turn, for America during a pivotal transition of its political and cultural histories.

One of Dyer's most influential concepts and a key tool for undertaking ideological analysis of stardom is a 'star image', which he defines as 'a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs' constructed across a range of media texts. Categorising these texts as 'promotion', 'publicity', 'films' and 'criticism and commentaries', Dyer proposes 'star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to "manage"

which is Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato (eds.), *Living in the Eighties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p. 19.

or resolve’.²¹ This theoretical and methodological model forms one of the cornerstones for approaching Fonda’s stardom. It is worth noting, however, that the star image concept was endowed with differing emphases in early scholarly debates. John Ellis, for example, suggests: ‘Star images are paradoxical. They are composed of elements that do not cohere, of contradictory tendencies. [...] It shows the star both as an ordinary person and as an extraordinary person.’²² This mix of ordinariness and extraordinariness, which may well function paradoxically as Ellis states, is actually useful when focusing on Fonda’s stardom, for as Dyer points out – albeit fleetingly – she directly engaged with the ‘contradictory’ political dimensions of fame:

Jane Fonda has sought in recent years [the late-1970s] to negotiate stardom politically – that is, to maintain a certain level of star glamour in order to connect with the predominant culture of working people while at the same time gaining credibility for her progressive views by living in an ordinary house in an ordinary working-class neighbourhood.²³

Dyer’s observation that Fonda negotiated stardom politically is an issue explored throughout this thesis in relation to the films made through IPC and the media generated both by these films and Fonda’s persona in its own right. Moreover, Fonda’s politicised engagement with her stardom was predicated on assuaging contradictions between ordinariness and extraordinariness as means of engaging with audiences politically; that is, IPC narratives featured characters within films that raised political points, with the hope that cinema audiences would be enlightened –

²¹ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 38. The categories of media text are discussed individually later in his chapter, pp. 68-72.

²² John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982), p. 93. Dyer’s approach to star images, nevertheless, has emerged as a dominant model of scholarly study.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

and mobilised – ideologically. Whereas Ellis suggests ‘[t]he star image is paradoxical and incomplete so that it functions as an invitation to the cinema’, in this case the ‘invitation’ did not end with the cinema, but rather the politicised cinema of IPC was an invitation to subsequently engage, through Fonda’s star image, with contemporaneous political issues the films had profiled, namely the legacy of Vietnam (*Coming Home*), the perils of nuclear power (*The China Syndrome*), and vocational issues of feminism (*Nine to Five*).²⁴

Dyer’s work also provides a crucial model for organising and analysing the abundance of media coverage stimulated by the prominence and scope of Fonda’s career. His specific discussion of Fonda’s star image using categorised media texts (‘publicity’, ‘promotion’, etc. – as outlined above) is a significant model for the purposes of star studies in general and this thesis in particular, given that I am concerned with how Fonda’s films and media presence functioned as parts of a strategic whole. Dyer proposes four areas of Fonda’s stardom (‘Father’, ‘Sex’, ‘Acting’, and ‘Politics’) through which he applies his concept of ‘structured polysemy’, summarised as ‘multiple but finite meanings and effects that a star image signifies’.²⁵ Approaching media texts in this vein, as well as incorporating Dyer’s proposition of structured polysemy, have provided models for scholars enlarging the concerns of the discipline. Notably, film theorist Tessa Perkins discusses Fonda’s star image and its polysemic dimensions in relation to what this has meant for feminists, reinforcing Dyer’s concept as a transferable theoretical model. Perkins delimits the

²⁴ These films do not comprise the entire corpus of IPC productions; rather, they best exemplify the combined political and commercial aims of the company before political concerns either failed to ignite popular interest or were removed altogether, as is the case with IPC’s last two films respectively, *Rollover* (1981) and *On Golden Pond* (1981). Chapters 5 and 6 explore these two films in greater depth.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72. Issues pertaining to Dyer’s specific study of Fonda’s star image are discussed at various points throughout this thesis so the transferability of Dyer’s work is instead discussed herein.

scope of her work from the outset, removing questions of Fonda's actual political beliefs and instead focusing on 'the process by which star images come to mean something to particular groups'.²⁶ Dyer and Perkins situate their readings of Fonda's star image along particular lines; Perkins is specifically concerned with what Fonda meant for feminists in the 1970s and Dyer stresses he is not trying to say 'what she meant for the "average person" at various points in her career, but rather what the range of things was that she could be read as meaning by different audience members'.²⁷ This thesis follows a critical line of divergence insofar as Fonda's star image is analysed alongside her active role in its construction, demonstrated through the use of published and unpublished sources; thus, Fonda's engagement with the 'average' person (specifically Americans) through media of various types and at a particular point in her career (the IPC years) are structuring criteria to be explored in full, rather than issues the work is positioned 'against'.

The broader historiographical issue raised here is that Perkins' and Dyer's analyses of Fonda's star image are, of course, examples from a discipline now endowed with multiple concerns and methodologies. Notably, both scholars make contributions to one of the foremost edited collections on the topic, *Stardom: Industry of Desire*, edited by Christine Gledhill. This collection reveals how star studies broadened methodologically in manifold ways and Gledhill summarises these changes in her introduction. She identifies that the multiplicity of meanings elicited by stars and stardom has, in turn, enlarged the disciplines employed by scholars across traditional boundaries. The widening of scope beyond the sociological and semiotic fusion proposed by Dyer, for example, is revealed in the following truncated passage:

²⁶ Tessa Perkins, 'The Politics of "Jane Fonda"', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 237.

²⁷ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 72.

The star challenges analysis in the way it crosses disciplinary boundaries: a product of mass culture, but retaining theatrical concerns with acting, performance and art [...] a figure consumed for his or her personal life, who competes for allegiance with statesmen and politicians.²⁸

Industry of Desire is also notable for pooling articles by scholars that have remained leading names in the field. Aside from Dyer, works by Jackie Stacey and Richard DeCordova are featured, each of whom have explored star studies along discrete lines of ethnographic research and historical analysis of Hollywood stardom respectively.²⁹ Similarly, Gledhill's collection has itself been followed by edited collections seeking to engage new paradigms of film stardom. For example, *Stars: The Film Reader*, edited by Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy, includes articles exploring stardom in cinema industries outside of Hollywood and concepts of stardom outside of cinema altogether, like network television.³⁰ The edited collection *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* also enlarges the parameters of star studies with contributions from scholars such as Paul McDonald, a long standing exponent of enlarging Film Studies as a discipline, who examines the impact of the internet on recent star discourses.³¹

McDonald occupies an interesting place in star studies by virtue of consistently positioning his own scholarship in direct relation to and yet distinct from

²⁸ Christine Gledhill, 'Introduction', in Gledhill (ed.), *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. xiii.

²⁹ Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London: Routledge, 1994); Richard DeCordova, *Picture Personalities: The Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

³⁰ Lucy Fischer and Marcia Landy (eds.), *Stars: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³¹ Paul McDonald, 'Stars in the Online Universe: Promotion, Nudity, Reverence', in Thomas Austin and Martin Barker (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 29-44.

that of Dyer. His publications on stardom include a textbook entry, an introductory volume, and, crucially, a supplementary chapter for the second edition of *Stars*, published in 1998.³² In the latter article McDonald proposes:

As the analysis of star images has considered issues of power in the struggles and negotiations of the moviegoer's making of meanings, so explorations of performers in film production will be concerned with how stars negotiate power relationships in their work of making meaning.³³

This thesis maintains dual focus on Fonda as both a Hollywood power broker and a figure of ideological consumption thereby acknowledging Dyer's and McDonald's mutually definitive grasp on the topic. Moreover, Fonda's role both onscreen and behind the scenes of her projects means that IPC can be approached both in relation to its vehicular and textual dimensions; that is, the objectives of IPC Films and the manner in which these reached the screen (and were received) are topics of discussion that interrelate with the sources and methods of film history.

The concept of what studying 'film history' entails has recently re-emerged as a topic of rigorous academic debate. In their edited collection, *The New Film History*, James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper frame their objectives around 'how the principles of historical investigation can be applied in practice in order to illuminate the structures and processes that have determined the nature of the medium of film

³² Paul McDonald, 'Star Studies', in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds.), *Approaches to Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 79-97; also *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (London: Wallflower Press, 2000); and 'Reconceptualising Stardom', in Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1998 [1979]), pp. 175-211.

³³ McDonald, 'Reconceptualising Stardom', p. 194.

and its social institutions’.³⁴ This provides a fundamental and progressive means of reconciling – in the case of this thesis particularly – the areas of Film Studies and American history into a shared contribution to film history. Cinema has specific qualities, in that it can generate intricate archival material while also manifesting as a filmic ‘text’ through ubiquitous channels of visual culture. The primary sources of this thesis have been selected and researched accordingly, taking into account categories of published and unpublished materials, and thus ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ documents. Abiding to set parameters of these categories has proven unnecessary and, moreover, actually indicated the breadth and depth of relevant sources. The handwritten notebooks of director Alan J. Pakula, for example, perhaps seen only by a handful of people, are analysed in one chapter while a cover of *Life* magazine, once a mainstay of supermarket shelves and newsstands across America, may be used in another. Both these sources can inform the study of film history.

Structure and methodology

The signifying elements of Fonda’s radical activism have proven of interest to academics across disciplines, whereas far less has been published on Fonda’s career after Vietnam.³⁵ A notable exception is Peter Krämer’s article in *The New Film History*, which explores Fonda’s filmmaking through IPC in a male-dominated Hollywood, and suggests: ‘Fonda’s success reassured the film industry that, working

³⁴ James Chapman, Mark Glancy and Sue Harper, ‘Introduction’, in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (eds.), *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1-2.

³⁵ Film scholar Michael Anderegg approaches Fonda’s stardom as a symbol of left-wing involvement with Vietnam, whereas social historian Mary Hersberger has used FBI documentation – amongst other primary sources – to refute the right-wing mythology that persists in relation to Fonda’s anti-war activism. Michael Anderegg, ‘Hollywood and Vietnam: John Wayne and Jane Fonda as Discourse’, in Anderegg (ed.), *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 15-32; Mary Hersberger, *Jane Fonda’s War: A Political Biography of an Antiwar Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2005).

on and behind the screen, women were able to attract audiences to movie theatres and to combine popular appeal with critical recognition.³⁶ Krämer makes a fundamental point; moreover, Fonda's success reassured not just the film industry but functioned as a recuperative force in the wider context of American society's shift toward conservative politics. This manifested in a variety of ways, including, crucially, the American popular press. Throughout this thesis Fonda's recuperative success is termed 'commercial-political' stardom and/or cinema as a way of summarising this phenomenon and her dual ambitions for IPC. On a more technical note, the term 'domestic rentals' is employed when discussing box office performance quantitatively. These figures have primarily been sourced from Joel Finler's work, in which he usefully defines domestic rental figures as: 'the most readily available and reliable indicator of the box office success of each film and the sum which can be set against the costs of production, distribution, advertising, etc., to determine whether the film was profitable or not.'³⁷ This definition aside, the general approach has entailed qualitative analysis of sources.

This thesis follows a largely chronological chapter structure and situates a certain film (or duo or trio of films) as the main axis of each chapter. The exceptions are the first and last chapters, which bracket the core years of the thesis and thus cover a wider temporal period while incorporating multiple films made within those periods. While treating Fonda's films simply *as films* is a valid and worthwhile approach, a wider view has been taken of their conceptions as ideas, alongside the media Fonda's stardom has concurrently generated given her political investment in each area. This has meant certain films Fonda made in Hollywood during this period but not through

³⁶ Peter Krämer, 'When "Hanoi Jane" Conquered Hollywood: Jane Fonda's Films and Activism, 1977-1981', in Chapman, Glancy and Harper (eds.), *The New Film History*, p. 107.

³⁷ Joel Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1988), p. 276.

IPC, namely *California Suite* (1978) and *The Electric Horseman* (1979), fall outside the remit of this thesis despite both being commercial successes. Conversely, *Klute* and *Comes a Horseman* (1978) – the former an earlier film, the latter a commercial disappointment, and both non-IPC productions – have been incorporated alongside the IPC project *Rollover* in a chapter based around Fonda's collaboration with Alan Pakula, who directed all three films. In short, the films Fonda made contributions to as a filmmaker rather than 'just' a star have been approached as key texts in keeping with the aims of this thesis.

Published and unpublished primary sources have been analysed according to the aims of each chapter. The archival papers of filmmakers that worked on Fonda's projects have been consulted in order to explore production histories and debate these matters more broadly using themes of authorship, stardom, and genre. These collections, which include the papers of Fred Zinnemann, Hal Ashby, Waldo Salt, Alan Pakula, and Katharine Hepburn, have been consulted at the Arts Special Collections division of UCLA and The Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, in Beverly Hills. Research using archival documents can encounter certain limitations; temporal gaps and narrowness of perspective, for example, can hamper the breadth of academic study when such resources are used exclusively. A range of published primary sources, therefore, have been analysed in order for both the published and unpublished materials to provide mutual contexts and meaning: given Fonda operated as a star-producer behind the scenes and concurrently maintained a ubiquitous media presence across magazines, newspapers, television, and Hollywood films, researching material that derives from 'inside' and 'outside' the archive is essential. Dyer states, 'The star phenomenon

consists of everything that is publicly available about stars.’³⁸ Moreover, the process of conducting and disseminating archival research enlarges those parameters of what is ‘publicly available’, allowing a re-evaluation of certain stars in historical context using archives as a site of star texts. Dyer contemplates whether Marilyn Monroe has now become ‘before everything else an emblematic figure, her symbolic meaning far outrunning what actually happens in her films’.³⁹ The same notion can be applied to Fonda’s stardom given her relationship to disparate phenomena, such as Vietnam and fitness culture. This thesis is structured, therefore, around a period of Fonda’s career when her ‘symbolic meaning’ can be significantly expounded (as one of many issues) using empirical, document-led methods, rather than simply theoretical approaches.

Chapter 1 charts Fonda’s cinematic career and her presence in the American media from her Hollywood debut in 1960 until 1977, with the films she appeared in functioning as a category of this media. The aim is to show how Fonda’s stardom came to ‘matter’ to American society by individually challenging (and her stardom symbolising an implicit challenge in certain cases) mainstream moral and political boundaries. By attracting news reportage in North Vietnam as a radicalised actress, Fonda’s associations with dissent reached critical mass; political recuperation or perpetual marginalisation were thus two possible outcomes of this episode. Chapter 2 centres on the historical film *Julia* (1977), in which Fonda starred as playwright Lillian Hellman during the 1930s. Hellman’s historical associations with the political Left, especially those of opposing McCarthyism in the 1950s, provided a benchmark for Fonda’s publicised opposition to Nixon, and *Julia* functioned as a recuperative star-vehicle after Watergate and Vietnam. The broader discussion of *Julia*’s

³⁸ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

production history and press attention suggests Hellman's activism was incorporated into Fonda's identity in a serendipitous way by reconciling leftist impulses – 'old' and new – into a political *and* patriotic star image.

Though not produced by IPC, *Julia* exhibits dramaturgical motifs of the IPC films that followed, including the idea of a politicised bystander. Chapters 3 (*Coming Home*) and 4 (*The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*) explore the development and production histories of these films, with the former focusing on archival documents revealing Fonda's interventions in the construction of her character. These are positioned against a wider backdrop of Fonda developing a media presence accessible to many different types of consumer, especially through the market of women's magazines. As *Coming Home* centred on the Vietnam War, these political concessions held significant weight for the star and nation alike, given Fonda's high profile associations with the conflict. *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* exhibit generic disparities but are reconciled in chapter 4 through a detailed discussion of how IPC sourced and developed ideas, as well as the social impact the films had when released. Addressing the issues of nuclear power and women's rights in the workplace, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* also rearticulated for a mass market the motifs of politicisation Fonda had begun to explore in her radical period, particularly her role in Godard's *Tout Va Bien*. Moreover, *The China Syndrome* occupies an exceptional place in cinema history in these terms because of the coinciding nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, which occurred twelve days after the release of the film.

Chapter 5 examines the only commercial failure of IPC Films, *Rollover*, in the context of Fonda's collaborations with director Alan Pakula. *The China Syndrome* and

Nine to Five worked within commercial genres to platform topical arguments; Fonda's films with Alan Pakula delved deeper into the power structures of American society, ranging from patriarchy in *Klute*, Western heroism in *Comes a Horseman*, and capitalism in *Rollover*. This scale of ambition is both worthy of analysis and a possible reason why the latter two films were commercial failures – in this regard, Fonda's films touched upon themes of American national identity that could not bear political scrutiny during this period, which is better known for nostalgia.⁴⁰ Notably, the nostalgic yet fictitious portrayal of Fonda's relationship with her father, as it is presented in *On Golden Pond*, secured IPC major box office success. Chapter 6 examines dynastic themes of Fonda's stardom as they influenced and were 'resolved' by *On Golden Pond*. Representing the rupture of commercial form with political content, the film nonetheless evoked the conservative political climate by investing in familial reconciliation as a narrative resolution. The implications of this for IPC were manifold yet the reliance on nostalgia in *On Golden Pond* arguably left Fonda well situated for embracing the cultural shifts that unfolded over the course of the 1980s.

The final chapter, like the first, covers a wider period with a focus on the 1980s. Marking the dissolution of IPC Films, eclipsed largely by the rise of Fonda's impact on the fitness industry, the end of the 1980s also gave rise to a new mythology surrounding her activities in Vietnam during the previous decade. As Fonda's political future looked increasingly corporate, her political past lurched back into the frame with profound implications for her legacy as an activist.

⁴⁰ *Rollover* anticipated Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* (1987) in many ways, suggesting a social desire to uphold the values of capitalism in 1981. *Comes a Horseman* was released the same year as *Grease* and *Superman* – 1978 – the top two films of the year and exemplars of reactionary nostalgia.

Chapter One

From Rebellion to Recuperation:

Jane Fonda's Stardom and Identity, 1960-1977

‘A new, more permissive society is taking shape. Its outlines are most prominently etched in the arts – in the increasing nudity and frankness of today’s films, [...] and, behind this expanding permissiveness in the arts stands a society in transition, [...] a society that cannot agree on standards of conduct, language and manners, on what can be seen and heard.’

Paul Zimmerman, ‘Anything Goes: Taboos in
Twilight’, *Newsweek* (13 November 1967), p. 40.

‘Jane Fonda stands a good chance of personifying American tensions and dominating our movies in the seventies as Bette Davis did in the thirties.’

Pauline Kael, ‘Gloria, the Girl Without Hope’,
New Yorker (20 December 1969), p. 67.

‘Late last year, Jane Fonda called reporters to the Los Angeles Press Club and told them she was suing the President. [...] Nobody attending the press conference seemed too surprised by the announcement, a measure of how Jane Fonda – and the nation – has changed.’

Leroy Aarons and Ron Ridenour, ‘Playboy Interview:
Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden’, *Playboy* (April 1974), p.
67.

Introduction

The association of Jane Fonda's stardom with elementary notions of change echoes, to varying degrees, the wider shifts of contemporaneous American culture and politics. Fonda has also registered and maintained a robust – if not always convivial – media presence within the United States, especially in relation to certain key events of the post-war era. In 1974, for example, Fonda had received close to fifteen years of media attention as a leading actress, which afforded the American public an extensive view of her successive and seemingly disparate image changes. With Nixon's presidency on the brink of collapse, the mid-1970s were also an acute period of national transition and Fonda duly told the *New York Times* with reference to her changing approach to activism: 'we are products of the social and historical forces of the era in which we live.'¹ Journalists and popular commentators to date have underlined this apparently slavish relationship to 'social and historical forces' that Fonda alluded to by portraying her various identities as essentially socio-cultural manifestations. Having attained international stardom amidst (and even because of) America's tumultuous political and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Fonda's changing persona has ostensibly signified social paradigms – not least in her experiencing a well-publicised radical awakening.² Yet to accept this position wholesale is to marginalise the noteworthy role Fonda has played in America as an historical figure as well as an historical symbol. Specifically, the period between 1960 and 1977, which constitutes roughly half of her cinematic career, can be reconciled

¹ Jane Fonda quoted in Martin Kasindorf, 'Fonda: A Person of Many Parts', *New York Times Magazine* (3 February 1974), p. 24.

² Cultural historian Peter Braunstein's article in *American Heritage* magazine summarises Fonda's stardom as 'a highly visible existence that has managed to encompass the country's moral, cultural, and political contradictions without being overwhelmed by them'. See Peter Braunstein, 'Ms. America: Why Jane Fonda is a Mirror of the Nation's Past Forty Years', *American Heritage* (July/August 2001), p. 39.

using a theme of ‘dissent’. Fonda’s dissent was signalled through her actions, as well as her embodiment of images exhibiting resistance or opposition – be that moral or political – to prevailing American norms of the time. Dyer groups Fonda within a category of ‘rebel’ star types, and this provides an initial context for locating dissent within Fonda’s image.³ Yet the pluralising of Fonda’s image has also, on occasion, resulted in a counterpoint image replacing definitive aspects of her foregoing identity; the transition from a politically ‘mute’ sex symbol to becoming a vocal activist, for example, is a case in point. Dissent ‘within’ Fonda’s image has thus functioned as a mechanism by which her identity has developed according to moral, political and social change. More broadly, Fonda’s relationship with the American mainstream has wavered between resistance and conformity, frequently in line with momentous historical junctures such as the sexual revolution and the Vietnam War. Largely presided over by the media, the evolution of Fonda’s stardom and identity offers an historical perspective on the wider journey ‘into’ and ‘through’ popular dissent in America during the 1960s and 70s.

The period under scrutiny in this chapter includes films indicative of Fonda’s developing talent as an actress and her emerging political awareness,⁴ yet these are partial elements of her associations with dissent. Rather, Fonda’s dissent can be discerned across a variety of temporal phases and historical contexts. The first of these was her development of ‘autonomous’ stardom, which coincided with, and was partially precipitated by, her emergence as an international sex symbol in France and America during the mid to late-1960s.⁵ Fonda’s media construction as a Franco-

³ Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 59-61.

⁴ For further discussion see Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 72-98.

⁵ My use of the word ‘autonomous’ refers to the development of Jane Fonda’s stardom beyond the parameters of being Henry Fonda’s daughter, which the initial years of her career were mostly defined

American ‘sex kitten’ is analysed in conjunction with contemporaneous journalism relating to American morality of the late-1960s, and evaluates her function as a symbol of ‘moral dissent’ within these discussions. Secondly, Fonda’s transition from sex kitten to political radical constitutes the most notorious image change of her career yet also confirmed Fonda’s active participation in shunning the comparatively ‘recognisable’ trappings of sexualised stardom in favour of manifest political activism. As exhibited by a variety of media sources, this transition embedded dissent within Fonda’s image, resulting in ‘politicised stardom’ that penetrated the realm of America’s national news. The latter two sections discuss Fonda’s anti-war activism as the high watermark of her politicisation and then chart the beginnings of her popular ‘reconfiguration’, which derived from two parallel and interactive sets of circumstances. First of all, Fonda’s position as an outspoken adversary of Nixon and the vindictory standing this acquired as a result of his downfall are examined in the context of the Watergate crisis. In addition, the modest beginnings of IPC Films, disposed toward ‘narratives of dissent’, are etched alongside her more conspicuous pursuit and reclamation of mainstream exposure, culminating in her return to Hollywood filmmaking during 1977.

Fonda and sexual morality, 1960-68

Fonda’s stardom interacted with popular notions of American morality during the 1960s. While media profiles between 1960 and 1964 typically defined her stardom as that of Henry Fonda’s daughter, Jane also courted controversy in her own right as

as in the mainstream press. In this regard, becoming a sex symbol was a way of carving out a distinct identity, especially given the non-American/French influence of this phase of her career.

early as 1961.⁶ The first links between Fonda's star image and 'moral dissent' were established after her beliefs regarding marriage were reported in Hedda Hopper's syndicated showbiz column. Hopper noted the starlet's 'outspoken ideas' branding marriage an 'obsolete institution' and concluded that 'only the young have such radical views.'⁷ Although Fonda mitigated the impact of Hopper's sensationalist angle by stating within the article that she wanted to marry once and for all, the contentiousness overrode the detail and stuck fast to her star image. As late as 1967, Fonda was still fielding responses to her comments regarding marriage and coyly admitted that she had understood all along their ability to garner her notoriety.⁸ Hopper's article also noted Fonda's altered appearance and demeanour, and by implication equated this with the starlet's adoption of a 'radical' stance on marriage: 'She came in to see me, a tall, glossily groomed young woman in an olive-green suede tailored suit, hair brushed severely away from the face and coiled in a knot at the back of her head. It was soignée and very different from the shoulder length bob and ingénue appeal of Jane, the magazine cover girl.'⁹ Fonda termed this early image change 'from model to actress', and the outspokenness accompanying it, an emancipation of sorts: 'It's partly that I've changed and partly the town [Hollywood]. [...] Still photographs show only what's there in the physical structure; you can't move and you can't speak.'¹⁰ Gaining 'a voice' demonstrated, moreover, that she

⁶ The relationship between Henry and Jane, and its biographical and ideological impact on Jane's stardom, is discussed at length in chapter 6.

⁷ Hopper's syndicated article appeared in various forms in multiple publications. See, for example, Hedda Hopper, 'Jane and Matrimony: "It's on the Way Out"', *Los Angeles Times Calendar* (9 July 1961), p. 3 and Hedda Hopper, 'If You Ask Jane Fonda – Marriage is the Bunk!', *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine* (9 July 1961), pp. 14, 16.

⁸ Referring to her 1961 comments six years later in the *New York Times*, Fonda demonstrated an understanding of the media worth of her controversial opinions but also underlined her commitment to using the media as a platform to air her views: 'I said it partly because I knew it was good copy, but I was speaking theoretically, and on that level I still believe it.' Fonda quoted in Gerald Jonas, 'Here's What Happened to Baby Jane', *New York Times* (22 January 1967), p. 91.

⁹ Hopper, 'Jane and Matrimony', p. 3.

¹⁰ Jane Fonda quoted in Hopper, 'Jane and Matrimony', p. 3.

would adopt a controversial timbre if it meant being heard amidst the din of America's media machine. As an outspoken 'bachelor girl', Fonda's vocalism is notable given her subsequent adoption of political causes at the close of the 1960s. In the immediate context of media notices emphasising her sexual appeal, Fonda represented an independent, hedonistic form of female identity that teetered on the fringes of moral acceptability.

A parallel and more identifiable aspect of Fonda's stardom during the 1960s was her emergence as an international sex symbol. This developed within various media forms and contexts, and represents a key tenet of Dyer's analysis of Fonda's star image.¹¹ Hollywood 'sex comedies', such as *Sunday in New York* (1963), *Any Wednesday* (1966) and *Barefoot in the Park* (1967), contrasted with more risqué films directed in France by Fonda's husband Roger Vadim, yet the collective upshot was a dualistic sexual identity. The American films imbued Fonda's sexuality with a naïve innocence (dictated somewhat by the weakening but nonetheless influential Production Code), and the European films furnished an image of sexual 'experience', thus enhancing the potential subversiveness of the former. The purpose of this section is to discuss the sexual dimensions of Fonda's star image and then highlight how her stardom 'crossed over' into contemporaneous media discussing notions of American morality. Demonstrating a sustained capacity for 'moral dissent', Fonda's stardom would symbolise 'permissiveness' for the American mainstream by the late-1960s, and a disquieting icon of Hollywood's disintegrating Production Code.

¹¹ Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 81-88.

Any discussion of Fonda's sex symbol phase as a mechanism of dissent must first identify its contradictory, conformist position within America's patriarchal ideology. Dyer notes that early journalism and reviews profiling Fonda and/or her films did so in terms of her looks, and frequently constructed her sex appeal in strikingly crude terms.¹² When Fonda had become well established as a sex symbol by the mid-1960s, this commentary also displayed signs of over-familiar cynicism. In response to *The Game is Over* (1966), Roger Vadim's updated version of *La Curée*, a character driven novel by Émile Zola portraying sexual and political intrigue amongst the Parisian *nouveau riche*, *Newsweek* observed: 'Miss Fonda deals primarily in bare bosoms, which are neither underdeveloped nor particularly emergent.'¹³ *Saturday Review* even suggested that Jane looked 'startlingly like Henry Fonda in drag [...] she lacks the physical accoutrements – no matter how she may flaunt them – to make a convincing seductress.'¹⁴ With criticism of Fonda, criticism of Vadim duly followed: the *New York Times* bemoaned 'Miss Fonda is less attractive with her clothes off than with them on, which knocks out the only plus factor that Mr. Vadim might had had going for him', and *Newsweek's* verdict concluded '[Vadim] has little subtlety, little sense of how each scene of a film, however frivolous it may be, should bare character as well as the actor's more easily accessible attributes.'¹⁵ These responses to the Vadim-Fonda partnership revealed complacency and an air of predictability to the cinematic spectacles they were producing together, yet in broader terms, Fonda's marriage to Vadim (1965 in America, then 1967 in France due to a legal loophole) was observed by journalists as a mellowing influence which 'resolved' her previous views expressed to Hedda Hopper branding the institution obsolete. Fonda's

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Joseph Morgenstern, 'Cuckold's Nest', *Newsweek* (16 January 1967), p. 57.

¹⁴ Arthur Knight, 'Starting the New Year Wrong', *Saturday Review* (31 December 1966), p. 36.

¹⁵ Bosley Crowther, 'Screen: *Game is Over*', *New York Times* (10 January 1967), p. 34; Morgenstern, 'Cuckold's Nest', p. 57.

comments had been an ‘authoritative, almost masculine [...] delivery of strongly held opinions’, wrote Lloyd Shearer in a 1967 issue of *Parade*, who suggested, furthermore: ‘Until her friendship and subsequent marriage to director Roger Vadim Plemiannikov in Las Vegas a year and a half ago, Jane Fonda wasn’t a particularly happy character.’¹⁶ This reportage contrasted with previous portraits of Fonda as an outspoken bachelor girl and revealed the ‘acceptability’ of her union with Vadim in its place, albeit occasionally subject to ridicule by reviewers – ‘marrying off’ Fonda to a sexual Svengali was a means of containing the star’s wayward tendencies. As such, the elements of Fonda’s sexual stardom that developed in their own right warrant attention, in order to reveal how her individual star image became a ‘moral signifier’ for the American mainstream.

Some sexual components of Fonda’s star image can be linked to phenomena preceding her films with and marriage to Vadim, despite popular notions that he was the total architect of this phase of her career. For example, comparisons made between Fonda and Brigitte Bardot thrived after Fonda’s marriage to Vadim (to whom Bardot had previously been married), but they actually had roots independent of the director. Bardot shot to fame in *And God Created Woman* (1956), whereas in the late-1950s Fonda’s media presence was that of a model-cum-celebrity daughter on her way to Hollywood. Nevertheless, in 1959 *Look* magazine struck the comparison, captioning photographs of Fonda frolicking in the surf with her midriff exposed as possessing ‘a kittenish Bardot quality,’¹⁷ alluding to her pin-up potential. While it was widely known Vadim had directed *And God Created Woman*, the principal link asserted was between the actresses sharing an ‘international’ sexual appeal. This appeal signalled

¹⁶ Lloyd Shearer, ‘Jane Fonda and Roger Vadim – What a Difference a Husband Makes!’, *Parade* (26 February 1967), p. 6.

¹⁷ Author uncredited, ‘The Inevitable Discovery of Jane Fonda’, *Look* (10 November 1959), p. 121.

Fonda's emergence as a star in her own right according to Alfred Aronowitz of the *Saturday Evening Post*, who in 1963 proclaimed: 'The evidence of [Fonda's] stardom lies in more than her father's opinion. It is in the growing number of men who smile at the mention of her name and in the covetous eyes with which they follow her image across a screen.'¹⁸ Aronowitz also observed a 'designed naughtiness' in Fonda's persona and endorsed the previous comparisons to Bardot:

Actually there is a similarity in the animal grace of [Fonda's and Bardot's] movements, in the erotic curl of their lips, in the hinted sensuality of their faces and above all in their hair. On Jane, a dirty-gold torrent, it falls to her shoulders with a studied, Bardot like lack of discipline.¹⁹

In this regard, Fonda's association with Bardot was a feature that Vadim cultivated rather than constructed, as American journalists had previously noted links between the women. This correlates with Dyer's observation that Fonda maintained her all-Americanness 'through' her films with Vadim and that he was simply 'one more aspect of her life that she was negotiating rather than being defined or taken over by'.²⁰ Moreover, the maturation of Fonda's sexual associations abroad also represented a potential threat to her 'all-Americanness', and thus exacerbated the moral instability of Fonda's star image in an American context. This was demonstrated by spectacles locating Fonda's image on the edge of contemporaneous notions of 'decency' and shall be discussed herein.

¹⁸ Alfred Aronowitz, 'Lady Jane: Henry Fonda's Daughter Zooms to Fame', *Saturday Evening Post* (23 March 1963), p. 24.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 88.

The instability of all-Americanness within Fonda's star image constituted a notable tension during this phase of her career. While the associations with Bardot stressed an international appeal as a sex symbol, Fonda was concurrently compared to quintessentially American screen goddesses. In response to her 1962 film, *Period of Adjustment*, critic Bosley Crowther suggested that Fonda's acting style was 'strangely familiar...could it be the late Marilyn Monroe that Miss Fonda seems to resemble? She surely won't mind our saying so.'²¹ In a darker, more 'intimate' tone, Aronowitz's article also compared Fonda's body-consciousness to that of Monroe.²² Media comparisons of Fonda's stardom with that of Bardot and Monroe thus suggested her sexuality was a composite of American and European attributes (notably before becoming involved with Vadim), which, in turn, constituted a nexus of differing moral frameworks regarding notions of decency, especially in relation to bodily exposure. 'Scandalous' events demonstrating this phenomenon eventually crossed over into news reportage and generated column inches in American newspapers. The *New York Times* reported the seizure of *The Game is Over* in Novara, Italy, in 1966 on obscenity charges after the film had been shown without incident at the Venice Film Festival.²³ Six months later, Vadim, Fonda, and the stars of *Circle of Love* (released 1964 in France, and 1965 in the US and Italy) were reportedly facing trial for immorality following a ruling by the Milan deputy prosecutor that the film was 'seriously offensive to the common sense of modesty, as felt by the normal and average man.'²⁴ These incidents demonstrated differing

²¹ Bosley Crowther, 'Screen: *Period of Adjustment* Opens', *New York Times* (1 November 1962), p. 34.

²² Aronowitz, 'Lady Jane', p. 25.

²³ Author uncredited, 'Jane Fonda Film Seized in Italy', *New York Times* (22 November 1966), p. 33.

²⁴ Milan's deputy prosecutor quoted in 'Vadim and Film Cast Face Morals Charges in Italy', *New York Times* (26 April 1967), p. 40. The outcry in Italy, a staunchly Catholic country, indirectly highlighted the contemporaneous weakening of Hollywood's Production Code (both films had screened without incident in America), which had been significantly influenced by the Catholic Church upon its inception in the 1930s.

responses to Fonda's films in Italy, a fiercely Catholic country, and the more secular France, the seedbed of her emergence as a sex symbol. At home in America, Fonda's relationship with the 'scandalous' elements of her career was considerably more ambiguous.

The sexual associations of Fonda's stardom garnered an array of media attention in America during the 1960s, which sometimes engaged issues relating to indecency. Besides caustic observations made by reviewers of her films, the spectacle of Fonda's nudity became an individual news item in 1965, when an eight-storey nude drawing of the star advertising her then latest film, *Circle of Love*, was unveiled in Times Square – and promptly draped with a canvas. Notably, the main objection came from Fonda, who reportedly suffered 'anguish' and 'shame' because of the 'unauthorised' picture.²⁵ Despite the image being essentially a promotion tool, Fonda's reaction to it paradoxically located her on both sides of the moral spectrum. *Circle of Love* profiled a series of sexual encounters, and Fonda's involvement represented the main allure for American cinema-goers, yet by objecting to the exposition of her own image with the 'outrage' of what were widely considered mainstream sensibilities, Fonda suggested her own personal morality was aligned with the majority of the nation. A similar episode saw Fonda suing *Playboy* for damages after the magazine surreptitiously procured nude photographs of her on the set of *The Game is Over*.²⁶ In this case, reviewers sarcastically noted that Fonda's objection to

²⁵ Author uncredited, 'Drawing of Jane Fonda is Draped With Canvas', *New York Times* (16 March 1965), p. 44. Fonda engaged lawyers to sue for compensatory and punitive damages totalling \$3 million.

²⁶ The photographer had purportedly hidden in the rafters of the set after it was cleared for Fonda's nude scene. Fonda called it 'breaking and entering' and an 'invasion of privacy'. Jonas, 'Here's What Happened to Baby Jane', p. 91.

the photographs functioned as a form of advance publicity for the film.²⁷ Individually, the Italian and American incidents revealed the morally inflammatory elements of Fonda's sexual stardom, both 'at home' and abroad, and apparently demonstrated the 'instability' of Fonda's all-Americanness during this phase of her career. In a broader context, this instability was representative of the erosion of censorship within Hollywood, and the moral debates this phenomenon was inspiring.²⁸

During the years that Fonda attained international stardom as a sex symbol, moral codes and practices within Hollywood films were concurrently being reconfigured. The 1960s witnessed a relaxation in cinematic content that would have previously been deemed unacceptable under the Production Code, and Fonda's stardom became associated with this phenomenon. In Arthur Mayer's *Saturday Review* article profiling the Code's growing leniency, *The Chapman Report* and *Walk on the Wild Side* (both 1962 films with sexual themes that featured Fonda) were cited as examples of Hollywood's emerging preoccupation with 'abnormal' subject matter.²⁹ Later in the decade, Fonda's 1967 film *Hurry Sundown* was issued with a 'C' for 'Condemned' due to sexual content by the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures (formerly the Legion of Decency), despite being passed by the newly altered Code (this was the first split decision between the two offices).³⁰ Indeed, by 1967 Fonda's stardom had become so synonymous with contemporaneous taboos that

²⁷ Knight, 'Starting the New Year Wrong', p. 36; Crowther, 'Screen: *Game is Over*', p. 36.

²⁸ Certain films, such as Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962) and Mike Nichols's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1966), attracted an acute amount of attention from censorship bodies during this period; *Lolita*, in particular, encountered problems under the 'sexual perversion' dictates of the Production Code. See Leonard Leff and Jerold Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood Censorship and the Production Code From the 1920s to the 1960s* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), pp. 214-266.

²⁹ In *The Chapman Report* Fonda played a frigid housewife and in *Walk on the Wild Side* she played a depression-era prostitute employed by Barbara Stanwyck's lesbian madam, 'Jo'. Arthur Mayer, 'How Much Can the Movies Say?', *Saturday Review* (3 November 1962), pp. 18-19.

³⁰ Vincent Canby, 'Hurry Sundown Gets Catholic "C"', *New York Times* (8 March 1967), p. 52; Paul Zimmerman, 'Preminger's South', *Newsweek* (10 April 1967), pp. 40-41.

Newsweek's special report on America's 'permissive society' featured her in a semi-nude cover photo taken from the forthcoming *Barbarella* (fig. 2). Mention of Fonda and/or *Barbarella* within the article was negligible, as the piece profiled the wider issue of America's disintegrating moral consensus; Fonda's image had, nonetheless, become representative of the nation's moral instability.

Newsweek's portrait of the nation's 'permissive society' considered the erosion of censorship in Hollywood films to be of paramount significance for American morality. Couching a discussion of permissiveness in the arts that canvassed opinion from voices as diverse as MPAA President Jack Valenti,³¹ theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, and Jesuit theologian Father Walter J. Ong, the article proposed: 'Nowhere has this process been more graphically dramatized than in the erosion of film censorship.'³² America's youth demanded that 'everything be seen and heard', *Newsweek* suggested, and incidences of filmic nudity and sexuality were given frequent mention, particularly with reference to the contemporaneous art house films *I, A Woman* and *I Am Curious: Yellow* (both 1967, and both featuring 'soft-core' sex scenes). These European imports, *Newsweek* concluded, were harbingers of the decline of American morals and paved the way for the forthcoming *Barbarella* in which Vadim 'presents not only his wife, Jane Fonda, in the nude, but a glimpse of the year 40,000 in which, as he explains it, "there are no taboos on sex, eroticism or nudity, no sin in nudity or the sex act.'"³³ Fonda's semi-nudity on the *Newsweek* cover was thus portrayed as both a symbol and an omen of America's descent into

³¹ Valenti later created the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] rating system in 1968.

³² Paul Zimmerman, 'Anything Goes', p. 41.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

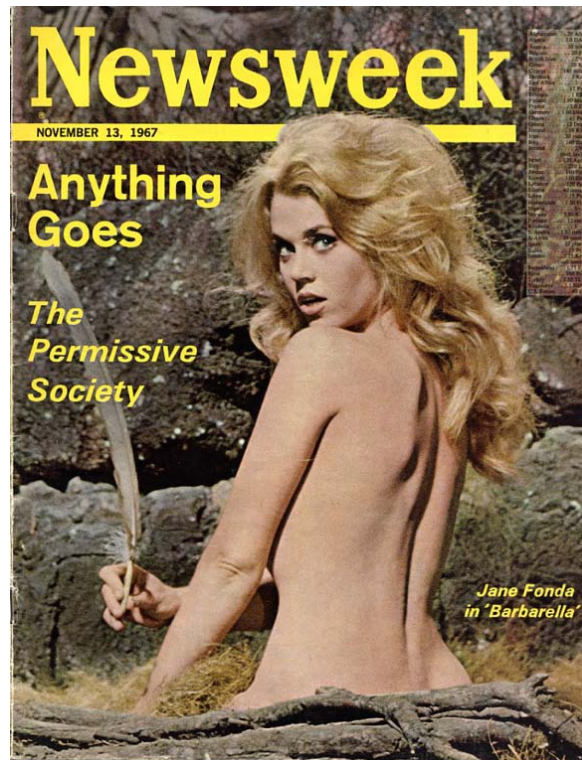


Figure 2. *Newsweek* (13 November 1967).

‘permissiveness’; a reflection to some, a threat to others.³⁴ Whatever the position of the moral majority regarding permissiveness, this cover photograph had become iconic of an American debate over censorship. It affirmed Fonda’s place in the national consciousness, situating her as a siren of the hedonistic ‘new morality’.

Embodying dissent, 1968-1972

As part of her international stardom, Fonda’s image had become emblematic of the youth-driven movement to challenge social taboos through the arts. During the late-1960s and early-1970s, Fonda transformed her political agenda and with this, her

³⁴ Idaho’s Meridian District School Board unanimously agreed to remove *Newsweek* from its social study courses because of the cover photograph. Author uncredited, ‘*Newsweek* Banned in Idaho’, *New York Times* (17 November 1967), p. 40.

appearance also altered. Embracing the struggles of Native Americans, African Americans, and feminists at a seemingly dizzying speed, Fonda jettisoned her previous sex symbol image and promptly parted ways with Vadim. Susan McLeland has considered this phase of Fonda's career, and places emphasis on the star's development of a radical position regarding the Vietnam War. The apex of Fonda's radicalisation, McLeland argues, came when her body was subsumed within the 'disembodied voice' that made broadcasts over Radio Hanoi in July 1972.³⁵ While Fonda's politicisation was certainly heightened through the isolation of her rhetorical voice, the shift in her visual representation also underpinned the popular reception and perceived legitimacy of her radicalisation, and should be analysed within specific contexts. The first of these, which became arguably her most famous screen role to that point upon its release, is *Barbarella*.

Barbarella (1968) was Fonda's last film before embarking on a process of politicisation. As the first English language collaboration between Fonda and Vadim, the film benefited from a wider American distribution than their previous efforts and constituted the apex of her sex symbol phase in America. Having received advance publicity of sorts on *Newsweek*'s cover, *Barbarella* was also promoted in sexual terms by Vadim, who claimed in the *New York Times* that the film offered a 'chance to escape totally from the morals of the 20th century and depict a new, futuristic morality'.³⁶ Upon its release in 1968, critical notices nonetheless stressed Fonda's redemptive impact on the film, particularly in terms of her national identity. Pauline Kael observed in the *New Yorker*: 'Jane Fonda having sex on the wilted feathers and

³⁵ Susan McLeland, 'Barbarella Goes Radical: Hanoi Jane and the American Popular Press', in Adrienne McLean and David Cook (eds.), *Headline Hollywood: A Century of Film Scandal* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 232-252, esp. 241-245.

³⁶ Vadim quoted in Jonas, 'Baby Jane', p. 91.

rough, scroungy furs of *Barbarella* is more charming and fresh and bouncy than ever – the American girl triumphing by her innocence over a lewd comic-strip world of the future’,³⁷ and *The Atlantic* claimed that the film’s ‘sexual attitude is mainly American, spiced by some old-fashioned French De Sade touches. [...] Miss Fonda is pretty and funny and gets to wear a lot of kinky space costumes.’³⁸ These responses depicted Fonda’s persona as an antidote to the explicit European cinema that *Newsweek* had profiled the year before: by merging ‘Americanness’ with the sexual themes of *Barbarella*, Fonda’s star image reconciled the contradictory moral ideologies the *Newsweek* article had keenly exposed. Moreover, Kael’s depiction of Fonda ‘triumphing over a lewd comic-strip world’ alluded to a victorious ‘Americanising’ influence over the warped ‘Europeanised’ future of *Barbarella*. When Fonda disassociated herself from this phase of her career in 1969, she was thus seen to abandon her ‘resolved’ status as an ‘all-American sex symbol’.

A newly altered Fonda returned to a radically changing American film industry. The late-1960s witnessed the advent of ‘the new Hollywood’, and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) – for which star-producer Warren Beatty once considered Fonda a potential lead – set the tone of this extraordinary period of filmmaking.³⁹ Echoing the spirit of these doomed gangsters, Fonda dramatically departed from her sex symbol phase through her role as the ill-fated Gloria in *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* (1969). The film marked both her return to Hollywood proper as a politically aware starlet and the end of her cinematic ventures with Vadim. Based on Horace McCoy’s novel set in the Depression-era, *Saturday Review* critic Hollis Alpert hailed *They*

³⁷ Pauline Kael, ‘The Current Cinema’, *New Yorker* (2 November 1968), p. 182.

³⁸ Dan Wakefield, ‘No Thrills, Lotta Laughs’, *The Atlantic* (April 1969), p. 141.

³⁹ Fonda, Tuesday Weld, and Natalie Wood were all in the running to play Bonnie before Beatty and director Arthur Penn settled on Faye Dunaway. See Mark Harris, *Scenes From a Revolution: The Birth of New Hollywood* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008), pp. 211-214.

Shoot Horses ‘unquestionably one of the three or four most important pictures of the year’.⁴⁰ Pauline Kael, in an otherwise damning review, bestowed Fonda’s new acting kudos: ‘Gloria...is the strongest role an American actress has had on the screen this year. Jane Fonda goes all the way with it, as screen actresses rarely do when they become stars.’⁴¹ *They Shoot Horses* represented an allegorical treatment of capitalism during one of its key historical crises. The narrative depicts desperate individuals competing in a ‘dance marathon’ to the point of total exhaustion for a prize that does not exist and follows Gloria’s story up to her suicide, which ends the film: in effect, Gloria radically ‘rejects’ the capitalist system when she realises that it leads to oblivion. This downbeat trajectory, Alpert noted, had ‘become box office’ alongside films like *Easy Rider* and *Midnight Cowboy*.⁴² Yet for Fonda the trend exhibited extra-textual dimensions; part of the spectacle of *They Shoot Horses* was the physical and mental deterioration of the central characters and in the case of Gloria, this had been meticulously planned.⁴³ The decline in Gloria’s physical appearance constituted a major transition of Fonda’s star image because her sex symbol phase had hitherto been its pre-eminent feature. In the context of *They Shoot Horses*, with its anti-capitalist themes, Fonda’s changing physicality represented the thrust of a new politicised identity.

As expressed through physical appearance, Fonda’s politicisation represented a visual counterpoint to her sex symbol phase, and graphically proclaimed her active

⁴⁰ Hollis Alpert, ‘At the End of the Year’, *Saturday Review* (27 December 1969), p. 21.

⁴¹ Kael, ‘Gloria, the Girl Without Hope’, p. 67.

⁴² Alpert, ‘End of the Year’, p. 21.

⁴³ Donfeld, the film’s costume designer, gave Gloria a rotation of five outfits for 26 costume changes, set over a narrative of 61 days. ‘*They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* wardrobe files’, file 10, box 2, Donfeld papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, USA [hereafter AMPAS].



Figure 3. *Newsweek* (13 November 1967) and *Life* (23 April 1971).

engagement with political dissent as both a lifestyle and belief system. This transformation was not confined to the fringes of society that had become Fonda's *cause célèbre* but rather played out across the nation's media (fig. 3).⁴⁴ The *Life* magazine cover illustrated below indicates where perceptions of Fonda had shifted during the social upheavals of the early-1970s. The image represents the consummate single woman on the move, both literally and symbolically. In contrast to the coquettish *Newsweek* portrait, the pose adopted here is one of assured objection to the photographic lens. Her gaze out of shot complements her forward motion by implying a sense of purpose requiring intense political stamina. The expression is one of intrepidity; here is a figure that has knowingly chosen the lonely high road, abandoning the safe confines of the Hollywood establishment she grew up in. Fonda had become associated with radical causes by this point, her image depicted as

⁴⁴ My use of *Newsweek*'s permissive society cover photo alongside a more 'radical' cover portrait is to demonstrate the differences in Fonda's appearance/image and her engagement with the media. Whereas *Newsweek* portrayed Fonda as a 'moral dissenter', *Life* places her in the realm of political dissent.

‘threateningly’ individual, as the visual source below indicates. By discarding her conventionally ‘pleasing’ appearance, favouring utilitarian clothes, and sporting her natural hair colour, Fonda embraced the feminist mantra ‘the personal is political’, and concurrently rejected her previous incarnation as a ‘constructed’ sex symbol.

Barbarella had been both the apex and the swansong of Fonda’s phase as a sex symbol, yet in moving away from this image, Fonda inadvertently revealed the high level of cultural expectation such a status carried. This process was evinced anecdotally on the one hand, as she recounted in a 1971 interview with *McCall’s* that her change in appearance had led people to ask ‘in disappointment’: ‘Are you really Jane Fonda?’⁴⁵ Also exhibiting international dimensions, *Time* reported that the Japanese ‘seemed somewhat disenchanted by Jane’s transformation’ during a 1972 overseas tour of military bases she conducted as a member of the Free Theater Associates (F.T.A.) troupe.⁴⁶ Both occurrences crudely exhibited the mainstream fallout of Fonda’s image transition. The question remains, however, as to why Fonda’s physical appearance had become a matter of such mainstream concern. As suggested above, Fonda’s role as *Barbarella* curatively merged the American and French (‘European’) components of her sexual stardom yet this was itself part of a larger tapestry. Sexuality permeated Fonda’s international career from its inception both on and off the screen, garnering varying levels of notoriety. Fonda’s physical appearance had thus constituted the central spectacle of her star image and being a sex symbol predisposed her subsequent ‘transformation’ into a radical activist an ‘event’ in and of itself for the American mainstream. Moreover, in attempting to reject sexual

⁴⁵ Oriana Fallaci, ‘Jane Fonda: “I’m Coming Into Focus”’, *McCall’s* (February 1971), p. 151.

⁴⁶ Co-performer Donald Sutherland described the theatrical troupe as ‘political vaudeville’, fashioned as an alternative to Bob Hope’s more conventional entertainment of US troops stationed in Asia. Author uncredited, ‘Typhoon Jane’, *Time* (3 January 1972), p. 38.

objectification through her physical appearance, Fonda developed a significant political ‘voice’ that paralleled her politicised body.

When accounting for her politicisation process in the mainstream press, Fonda employed strategies that both visually and verbally rejected her years as a sex symbol. In a May 1972 interview with *Rolling Stone*, she claimed that the social emphasis on ‘sexiness’ was symptomatic of cultural excess: ‘objects and possessions and physical appearances and having to be sexy [...] it’s just part of a decadent society. It has nothing to do with what’s important in life.’⁴⁷ By couching sexual stardom within a critique of American society, Fonda echoed her representation in *They Shoot Horses* and proposed a wholesale rejection of the feminine identities she had previously been seen to embody. This was a theme exhibited by her 1971 film, *Klute*, in which Fonda’s call girl character explores sexual politics in theory and in practice.⁴⁸ Moreover, a real life ‘role’ Fonda was publicly seen to reject was that of being Vadim’s wife, which journalists in the 1960s had deemed a mellowing influence on her outspoken ‘bachelor girl’ image. Yet in the 1970s, Fonda’s position on marriage had shifted again, as profiled in a sympathetic *McCall’s* interview published in 1971: ‘I can no longer conceive of having a relationship with a man and doing for a man what I did for Vadim. It will never happen again. I’ll never be a wife again.’⁴⁹ Fonda’s drive for independence hereby received interest from publications that catered for significantly different readerships. *McCall’s*, a monthly glossy magazine for women, was a far cry from the counter-cultural *Rolling Stone*, in which Fonda discussed the collapse of her marriage and her radicalisation a process of cause and

⁴⁷ Fonda quoted in Tim Findley, ‘Jane Fonda: The Woman and the War’, *Rolling Stone* (25 May 1972), p. 42.

⁴⁸ *Klute* will be discussed at greater length in my later chapter on Fonda and Alan J. Pakula.

⁴⁹ Fonda quoted in Fallaci, ‘Coming Into Focus’, p. 150.

effect: 'And so I got married, and then I discovered that that was even worse and so I split after seven years of trying to be the perfect wife. At that point it was a time when you simply couldn't avoid the war. You could not avoid the lie.' In addition to her critique of marriage, Fonda couched her politicisation within an embrace of motherhood: 'When Vanessa was born...I began to love people, to understand that we do not give life to a human being to have it killed by the B-52 bombs, or to have it jailed by the Fascists, or to have it destroyed by social injustice.'⁵⁰ By fusing the process of becoming a mother with allusions to America's domestic and foreign crises ('social injustice'; 'B-52 bombs'), Fonda carved out a distinctly female political voice for herself, inflamed by her new consciousness as a single woman, critical of marriage once more.

Fonda's activist agenda garnered media exposure outside of the conventional channels of Hollywood stardom and was subject to the political leanings of publications she featured in. Having adopted both a vocal and physical activist image, the means by which Fonda's 'total' political identity was presented through the media duly changed. The interviews in *McCall's* and *Rolling Stone* were sympathetic to Fonda's politicisation, allowing her to discuss at length issues such as race, feminism, and the Vietnam War. Such publications, especially *Rolling Stone*, were more liberal than most and represented the mainstay of stars, insofar as stars were regularly featured. Additional exposure included the moderately intellectual *Saturday Review*, which neutrally profiled Fonda's political vision of America: 'I think the system can be changed at a root level without a violent revolution because I think our present

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 148.

economic structure will collapse of its own weight.’⁵¹ The leading right-wing current affairs weekly, *National Review*, discussed Fonda’s politicisation in a disparaging light, branding her an ersatz political figure: ‘if George McGovern is elected President, he will name as his Secretary of State Miss Jane Fonda. She is already practising for the role, and indeed it is widely conjectured that she hasn’t been informed that she isn’t yet the Secretary of State.’⁵² These responses to Fonda’s politicisation are illuminating yet unsurprising given the respective leanings of each publication. Rather, it is the breakthrough of Fonda’s image into the realm of national news that heightened the debate over the legitimacy of her political identity. During 1970, for example, eleven separate evening news stories mentioning Fonda’s political activities and/or her arrest at Cleveland airport for alleged drug smuggling were broadcast across America’s three major newscasters of the era: ABC, CBS, and NBC.⁵³ No longer confined to the column inches of critics’ reviews and glossy magazine features, Fonda’s presence and commentary were reported in stories discussing the activities of the Black Panthers and the struggles of Native Americans. This ratcheted up exposure of Fonda’s political identity to a critical level, at a point when she was embracing her most notorious radical cause: anti-war activism.

Fonda’s fall and rise: Vietnam and Watergate, 1972-1974

In retrospect, Vietnam and Watergate are mentioned in tandem to refer to a generally downbeat American era: they are historical shorthand for widespread disillusionment,

⁵¹ Fonda quoted in Cleveland Amory, ‘Trade Winds’, *Saturday Review* (10 October 1970), p. 14.

⁵² W. F. Buckley Jr., ‘Secretary Fonda’, *National Review* (18 August 1972), p. 918.

⁵³ For example, Fonda’s arrest at Cleveland airport on 3 November 1970 featured on all three networks, with a follow-up story the day after reporting her plea of innocent against charges of drug smuggling and kicking a policeman. Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee [hereafter VTVNA]. Database records sourced at <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>. Accessed 31 May 2008.

scandal, and crises. For Fonda, Vietnam and Watergate each had a different impact upon her star image during the 1970s. Whereas Vietnam constituted Fonda's most infamous hour, eventually earning her the deprecating moniker 'Hanoi Jane' in reference to her July 1972 visit to North Vietnam, the Watergate scandal signalling Nixon's downfall was a turning point, a vindication of her criticism of Nixon and his government. It is rare for a public figure to be perceived in such diametrically opposed terms when the historical phenomena in question otherwise appear so definitively linked. Through being represented as a dissenter in relation to Vietnam and Watergate in significantly different ways, Fonda's star image revealed on the one hand how the mainstream press was discovering ways to report on her radicalism more favourably, and on the other, the process of Fonda drawing back from political dissent as a 'total' identity.

Historians have taken differing positions regarding the legitimacy of Fonda's 1972 visit to North Vietnam, and the extremes of this debate continue to pull away from one another.⁵⁴ It is not the purpose of this chapter to intervene in this debate, yet clearly Fonda's highly controversial trip to Hanoi constituted the most notorious episode of this phase of her career and cemented the legacy of her activism. Specifically, by throwing herself headlong into America's anti-war and New Left political movements, Fonda adopted a publicly adversarial position against President Nixon, his Administration, and America's involvement in Vietnam. In turn, Fonda's open hostility toward Nixon and his Vietnam policies was willingly telegraphed by

⁵⁴ On the far right, Henry Holzer and Erika Holzer argue that Fonda would have (and should have) been found guilty of treason in an American court had she been charged. Mary Hershberger's more sympathetic study identifies how the reality of Fonda's activism became retroactively corrupted by the post-war mythmaking applied to America's involvement in Vietnam. Henry Holzer and Erika Holzer, *Aid and Comfort: Jane Fonda in North Vietnam* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2006 [2002]); Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, esp. pp. 167-189. Both books were published (or republished) after the publication of Fonda's autobiography in May 2005.

the American media and bore significant results. In July 1972, the *New York Times* reported that Fonda had branded Nixon a 'traitor' upon her return from North Vietnam, and 'someone who is committing the most heinous crimes I think have ever been committed'.⁵⁵ Between 17th July and 25th September 1972, Fonda was also featured or mentioned in fourteen separate evening newscasts covering Vietnam on the ABC, CBS, and NBC networks.⁵⁶ These ranged from excerpts of broadcasts she had made over Radio Hanoi to American pilots, to a Justice Department investigation into whether she broke the law by making them. In essence, Fonda had become the celebrity figurehead of America's anti-war movement and a symbolic adversary of Nixon's old guard political establishment. A particular instance involved the State Department issuing the text of an intelligence report investigating the bombing of dikes in North Vietnam just days after Fonda had made her televised tour of bomb damaged dikes southeast of Hanoi.⁵⁷ In a general sense, the focus on Fonda's anti-war rhetoric and activities increased, but this concurrently positioned her as an extreme and identifiable representative of political dissent during the early-1970s.

The controversy surrounding Fonda's anti-war activism grew from a number of quarters. In the case of her Hanoi visit, this was near instantaneous. On 14th July 1972, Fonda visited and sat atop a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun position used to shoot down American planes, surrounded by the world's media. Within a week, Georgia Congressman Fletcher Thompson demanded the Justice Department try

⁵⁵ Fonda quoted in 'Jane Fonda Accuses Nixon', *New York Times* (25 July 1972), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Key segments include initial reports of Fonda visiting North Vietnam and broadcasting over Radio Hanoi (17 July 1972, NBC), her press conference in Paris during which she claimed every American President involved in Vietnam was guilty of treason (25 July 1972, ABC), and, subsequently, a segment covering the House Internal Security Committee's vote to request a report from the Justice Department on Jane Fonda's actions in North Vietnam (10 August 1972, CBS). VTVNA.

⁵⁷ The report mentioned Fonda by name and refuted her claims that it was American policy to bomb Vietnamese dikes and thus destroy civilian areas. 'Text of Intelligence Report on Bombing of Dikes in North Vietnam Issued by State Department', *New York Times* (29 July 1972), p. 2.

Fonda for treason and CBS aired this footage to illustrate his campaign.⁵⁸ A month after that, the Veterans of Foreign Wars accused Fonda of being ‘traitorous’ and recommended that she be prosecuted by the Federal Government.⁵⁹

In 1973, matters took another turn when Fonda reacted scornfully to published accounts of returned American prisoners of war. This controversy crested with Fonda’s accusation that the American POWs were liars if they claimed it was North Vietnamese policy to torture them. In seeking to clarify her position after it elicited widespread vitriol, Fonda wrote an open letter to the *Los Angeles Times* replete with further inflammatory statements accusing the same POWs of being ‘pawns of the Nixon Administration propaganda effort to justify the war’.⁶⁰ Nixon was the ringmaster of these allegedly tortured ‘heroes’, Fonda argued, and they should be judged by his own political history: ‘Should we not question stories which are being embraced by the Administration whose commander in chief was instrumental in ushering in the McCarthy era? [...] The Nixon Administration is in desperate need of heroes.’⁶¹ This approach even drew criticism from radical quarters, with the *Los Angeles Free Press* claiming that Fonda’s POW comments had ‘discredited’ the peace movement: ‘this line of reasoning while hard to refute factually has caused millions to react negatively to Jane Fonda and consequently to the American anti-war

⁵⁸ *CBS Evening News* (21 July 1972), VTVNA. Thompson’s request was later rejected by the House Internal Security Committee by an 8 to 1 margin on 10th August 1972. Author uncredited, ‘House Committee Refuses to Subpoena Jane Fonda’, *New York Times* (11 August 1972), p. 59. Images of Fonda sat on the anti-aircraft gun position have nonetheless been the mainstay of subsequent waves of her critics to the present day.

⁵⁹ Author uncredited, ‘V.F.W. Urges Prosecution of Clark and Miss Fonda’, *New York Times* (24 August 1972), p. 9.

⁶⁰ Jane Fonda, ‘Jane Fonda Amplifies on Her POW Stand’, *Los Angeles Times* (9 June 1973), Jane Fonda Clippings Collection, AMPAS [hereafter JFCC/AMPAS]. Fonda also sought to clarify her position of North Vietnamese torture ‘policy’ in *Time* (16 April 1973).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

movement.’⁶² In the American heartland, Fonda encountered further hostility. During March 1973, a resolution was submitted to the Maryland General Assembly declaring her *persona non grata* because of her anti-war sentiments. The following month, South Carolina’s Legislature requested that theatres ‘voluntarily’ not show any films featuring Fonda; the Indiana State Senate adopted a resolution censuring her, and a Dallas television station even postponed indefinitely a screening of Fonda’s first film, the innocuous *Tall Story* (1960). Fonda’s Hollywood career after Vietnam was negligible or at best marginalised, as discussed in the introduction. In adopting an adversarial position against Nixon over Vietnam, Fonda thus affronted the voting bloc of his 1972 landslide presidential election victory over anti-war candidate George McGovern – in short, she had become ‘Hanoi Jane’.⁶³

If Vietnam poisoned Fonda’s mainstream legitimacy and popularity, Watergate supplied the antidote. The Watergate crisis created a matrix of suspicion against Nixon and his Administration that Fonda stood to benefit from because of her adversarial stance against both. Shortly after the POW controversy in 1973, newspaper stories continued to unravel the Watergate crisis. These typically noted Fonda’s entry on the voluminous White House ‘political opponents’ lists: Fonda’s adversarial stance against Nixon made her inclusion on the lists unsurprising, but crucially she had become part of a constellation of names deemed of potential harm to the Nixon Administration *by* the Nixon Administration. Contrasting with the lone, shunned figure of ‘Hanoi Jane’, Fonda’s ‘political opponent’ status located her within a catalogue of dissenters on the White House list, as compiled by Charles Colson,

⁶² Ron Ridenour, ‘Jane Fonda Speaks on POWs and the Role of Women in Vietnam’, *Los Angeles Free Press* (27 April 1973), p. 11.

⁶³ For a detailed discussion of Fonda’s vilification as ‘Hanoi Jane’, see Jerry Lembcke, *Hanoi Jane: War, Sex and Fantasies of Betrayal* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

Nixon's chief counsel, which also included the actor Paul Newman. As an identifiable figure within what I am terming the 'Watergate matrix',⁶⁴ Fonda nonetheless maintained her adversarial position against Nixon in a fashion that bore out her established anti-war sentiments. On 18th October 1973, Fonda filed a \$2.8 million damage suit against Nixon and other top government officials, which alleged they had 'conspired to deprive her of her constitutional rights'.⁶⁵ The following year, on the eve of Nixon's resignation, Fonda lodged a successful legal request to have named the list of persons and groups attached to the so called 'Huston Plan', which had proposed that Nixon authorise relaxation of restraints against domestic intelligence operations.⁶⁶ In the context of the Watergate matrix, Fonda's actions were ostensibly part of the 'heroic' effort to discover the 'truth' about Nixon and his White House cronies, and her lawsuit, in particular, received further press coverage.⁶⁷ By bringing charges against not only Nixon but also the FBI and CIA, Fonda was portrayed as a high-profile victim of governmental systems that had deviated from principles of American liberty. This transferred the question of legitimacy away from Fonda's political identity and onto the institutions and individuals she had so vehemently criticised.

⁶⁴ This term is used to allude to any conspiratorial action – or potential action – that was reported by the press and attached to the White House conjecturally or otherwise. In their totality, these stories embroidered the machinations of the Watergate conspirators and Fonda's adversarial approach to Nixon drew him further into the fray by suggesting he was their ringleader.

⁶⁵ The FBI compiled a voluminous dossier on Fonda and her activism that included unauthorised monitoring of her mail and financial transactions. Author uncredited, 'Jane Fonda Sues Nixon, Alleging

U. S. Harassment', *New York Times* (19 October 1973), p. 54.

⁶⁶ Author uncredited, 'Jane Fonda Wins Bid to Get Names', *New York Times* (24 July 1974), p. 13. Nixon admitted to being aware of its existence but the Huston Plan was never put into effect: Fonda's triumph in this instance was one of exposing the potential of Nixon's Administration to breach of civil liberties, which essentially formed part of the Watergate matrix.

⁶⁷ Author uncredited, '70 Effort by Hoover to Discredit Jane Fonda Described in Memo', *New York Times* (16 December 1975), p. 26.

When the national gaze shifted toward the Watergate crisis and what was fast becoming a lost war in Vietnam, Fonda found herself well positioned to pass judgement on these developments in the mainstream press. Her mouthpieces were publications that had nurtured her stardom to varying ends; these were magazines as diverse as the conventional women's monthly *Redbook*, the left-leaning *New West*, and *Playboy*, which needs little introduction. In one sense this indicated Fonda's retreat from (and/or displacement from) the glare of national news in print and on television: her stardom had begun to inhabit a more conventional realm after the 'peak' of her radicalisation. Yet by reiterating her anti-Nixon position throughout the Watergate crisis, Fonda was also cast in a vindictory light that suggested her rebellion and dissent had a legitimate part to play in the due processes of American cultural and political life.

Fonda's mainstream credentials as a commentator on Watergate were enhanced by some compromises in her radical activist persona. In January 1973, Fonda had married fellow anti-war activist and New Left radical Tom Hayden. As with the previous patterns of marriage in Fonda's life and stardom, marrying Hayden was subsequently portrayed as a 'taming' influence by the press, despite his associations with violent political action.⁶⁸ A sympathetic profile in *Viva* magazine claimed in 1976:

Since her marriage, Jane's lifestyle and rhetoric have cooled. There's less visible tension and fury, and she's unlikely these days to describe herself as a revolutionary woman. [...] Perhaps her new domesticity stems from the relief

⁶⁸ Hayden was one of the so-called 'Chicago Seven', convicted (and subsequently acquitted) for incitement to riot during the 1968 student uprisings. After their marriage, Fonda and Hayden jointly courted the American mainstream.

Jane must feel because she and Hayden have survived their intense political involvements.⁶⁹

Part of Fonda's 'survival' that *Viva* referred to was realised through her mainstream repositioning in relation to the Watergate crisis, a process influenced both by certain branches of the press and also actively pursued by Fonda and Hayden in their dealings with the media. In a 1974 interview with *Playboy* during the months leading up to Nixon's resignation, Fonda and Hayden made factual references to Watergate but also persistently uttered many conjectural statements that enlarged the Watergate matrix concept outlined above. Hayden speculated that if Watergate had 'succeeded', a police state would have been established, and Fonda insinuated that Nixon's landslide election victory of 1972 was 'the product of his deceptions.'⁷⁰ Capitalising on the conspiratorial, amorphous nature of the crisis from a popular perspective, Fonda ventured that the investigators should approach Watergate 'in terms of a grand conspiracy that might have been responsible for the assassinations of the Sixties and that may be traceable to people working for the Committee to Re-Elect the President [CREEP].'⁷¹ Radicals and liberals were the victims of the Watergate conspiracy as much as the American people according to this line of reasoning, and were thus more aligned with mainstream opinion.

The legitimacy of Fonda's catch-all approach to Watergate, suggesting it was the root of all ills in America, would have been considerably weaker were it not for the antagonism between her and Nixon's White House. This strategy inflected Fonda's engagements with the American press from 1974 onward and gave credence

⁶⁹ Claudia Dreifus, 'The Taming of a Revolutionary', *Viva* (May 1976), p. 45.

⁷⁰ Aarons and Ridenour, 'Playboy Interview', pp. 73-74.

⁷¹ Fonda quoted in Aarons and Ridenour, 'Playboy Interview', p. 76.

to the allusion that her activism was part of the effort to 'bring Nixon down'. The *Playboy* interview represented the first attempt at this, and facilitated reconfiguration her 'Hanoi Jane' image. In recounting her visit to North Vietnam Fonda proposed:

The controversy that was created about my trip – my charges that the U.S. was bombing dikes, the films I had showing the damage – became very important to the Administration. Don't forget that Nixon was trying to get elected as a man who was winding down the war. [...] That's why there were all the shouts of treason. It was a Nixon tactic he'd used since the Fifties to discredit his critics.⁷²

In fielding questions about the ongoing mainstream hostility her trip had inspired, Fonda suggested this was largely stage managed at grassroots level by CREEP personnel: 'It's made to look like spontaneous Americana, but its roots are in Watergate.'⁷³ *Viva* and *New West* magazines also ran interviews with Fonda during 1976, in which her 'victimisation' was hemmed into the Watergate matrix, thereby suggesting her experience was a high-profile case representative of many which received less attention. Fonda maintained that her reaction to the campaign against her had been anger, not fear.⁷⁴ This cast her in an heroic light, given that her personal and political life had become intertwined within the reportage of the Nixon Administration 'dirty tricks' campaign against political dissidents. Suggesting a crisis existed over what being a patriot entailed during the Watergate investigations, Fonda told the *New York Times* in February 1974: 'We should not allow right-wingers, of the likes of the

⁷² Ibid., pp. 78, 80.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁴ Dreifus, 'Taming of a Revolutionary', p. 48; Nick Kazan, 'Jane Fonda: Winning By Her Own Rules', *New West* (24 May 1976), p. 35.

Nixon Administration, to take our American flag away from us.’⁷⁵ The recuperation of Fonda’s place in the American mainstream had begun.

Working within the system, 1974-1977

The years of the Vietnam War witnessed a crest of radical activism within both American society and Jane Fonda’s stardom, and the two have henceforth remained intertwined in both myth and memory. In the immediate aftermath of Watergate, however, popular perceptions of political dissent shifted sympathetically just as executive powers encountered significant scrutiny and scepticism. Publicly, Fonda’s media presence was that of a ‘survivor’ of the ‘dirty tricks’ campaign against her and many others; radicals, and especially liberals, had been vindicated by the collapse of Nixon’s White House. Within this political and cultural climate, Fonda and Hayden had almost become the ‘good guys’ by proxy, and they began to pursue mainstream legitimacy – to work ‘within the system’. By cooling their radical agenda, Fonda and Hayden reflected the paradoxical nature of contemporaneous New Left advances; with the anti-war cause justified, the domestic struggle for change lost its revolutionary zeal.

Fonda’s image change from a sex symbol to a political radical remained an unresolved issue in the wake of her anti-war activism and represented a driving force for Fonda’s subsequent overtures to the American mainstream. On the one hand, Fonda began to distance herself from both of these phases retrospectively, yet a desire

⁷⁵ Fonda quoted in Kasindorf, ‘Person of Many Parts’, p. 24.

to 'decode' her transition from, put crudely, 'Barbarella into Hanoi Jane', also existed. Fonda acknowledged in a 1976 interview with *Viva* that these two images had constituted an impasse in her public persona: '*Barbarella* had just been released when I became politically active. I'd go to some town and speak at an antiwar rally and *Barbarella* would be playing down the block. The two images are hard to reconcile.'⁷⁶ Though seemingly antithetical, the *Barbarella* and Hanoi Jane images nonetheless represented oppositional elements contained on a wide spectrum of 'glamour' – the radical chic syndrome of Hanoi Jane was as ostensibly 'unreal' as being a sex symbol. Indeed, as early as 1974, Fonda had embarked on a quest to ground her persona within the context of the 'real' to resolve the sex symbol/political radical dichotomy that her identity had hitherto been defined by: 'There's a contradiction between being involved in a movement for social change and also being a movie actress in Hollywood. [...] I am trying to reduce that contradiction as much as possible.'⁷⁷ This process involved a different kind of exposure on Fonda's part, namely the revelation that besides being an internationally acclaimed actress and activist, in her everyday existence she lived like 'one of us'.

By the mid-1970s, swathes of '60s radicals were reconfiguring their position within the American political system, with Fonda and Hayden constituting high-profile representatives. A conscious effort to demonstrate and underline conventional areas of their everyday lives preceded Fonda's return to Hollywood; the need to de-glamorise Fonda was also a strategy aligned with an (unsuccessful) campaign in 1976 to woo California voters into electing Tom Hayden to the Senate, his platform

⁷⁶ Fonda quoted in Dreifus, 'Taming of a Revolutionary', p. 48.

⁷⁷ Fonda quoted in Kasindorf, 'Person of Many Parts', p. 16.

centring on the vaguely termed ‘Campaign for Economic Democracy’ [CED].⁷⁸ A feature in a 1975 issue of *People* (fig. 4) insisted on the everyday quality of Fonda and Hayden’s existence: images of Fonda and Hayden’s daily grind accompanied text reassuring the reader of their grass-roots approach to economic justice and ‘the



Figure 4. *People* (23 June 1975).
Fonda as an ‘ordinary’ wife and mother.

American way’. Despite Fonda being the primary breadwinner, she appeared within the recognisable confines of domestic femininity, displacing earlier incarnations of independence.

The decision to court the American mainstream was evidently a joint one, but had different implications for Fonda and Hayden as individuals. Just as Fonda’s sex symbol phase has been credited to Vadim, so too has her ‘recuperating radical’ political persona been portrayed as Hayden’s brainchild. The problem with this chauvinistic approach is that it does not account for Fonda’s relationship with

⁷⁸ A ‘share the wealth’ policy of economic de-centralisation.

America at large and the protracted evolution of her stardom within the nation's cultural – and political – spheres. Fonda's ability to both embody and transcend the identity of an era was demonstrated through her wrestling free of Vadim's sexual Svengali role during the late-1960s. In the case of Hayden, Fonda's emerging cordiality with the mainstream eclipsed his overtures because it was she that had originally dissented from a position of popularity and thus was seen to be reconciling with, rather than simply 'courting', the nation at large.

This path to mainstream reinstatement exhibited patterns in the press that portrayed Fonda's rebellion and dissent as part of the fabric of American national identity. Previous media profiles had concentrated on Jane's status as Henry's daughter, and a recurring theme of 'inheritance' in terms of looks, talent and liberal credentials was cited from the outset of her career.⁷⁹ The dynastic element of Jane Fonda's stardom was also stressed in relation to America's 'heritage'. Martin Kasindorf's 1974 in-depth profile in the *New York Times Magazine* highlighted both Fonda's catalogue of opposition against Nixon and noted her mother's ancestral links to Boston revolutionary Samuel Adams. By coupling Fonda's contemporaneous dissent with that of one of America's Founding Fathers, Kasindorf applied a gloss of historical dignity to her political efforts in advance of both the American bicentennial and Fonda's return to Hollywood filmmaking. Elevating the Fondas to quasi-noble status within American society, however, was somewhat of a return to type in light of previous reportage. Alfred Aronowitz's *Saturday Evening Post* profile of 1963 had carried the theme of Jane inheriting elements of Henry's persona but especially identified maternal ancestral links to both Samuel Adams and Jane Seymour, Henry

⁷⁹ See Tom Prideaux, 'Flowering of a New Fonda', *Life* (22 February 1960), pp. 71-74.

Tudor's third wife.⁸⁰ As the apparent descendant of both a revolutionary and an English queen, Fonda's association with the American nation was contradictory, yet significant. The tendency of inventing American royalty (e.g. the Kennedys) took on new force in the 1970s, as America grappled with its domestic crises.

The year 1974, during which the pendulum of political legitimacy had begun to swing in Fonda's favour, provided another layer of her quest for mainstream exposure. 'Jane Fonda is as active in films as she is politically', wrote the *New York Times* in announcing a raft of projects she was involved in.⁸¹ With similar announcements appearing in the trade paper *Variety*, Fonda began a process of fusing her cinematic and political identities to mutually reinforcing ends. Hayden's involvement in this venture was thinly veiled: 'The kind of films [Jane] wants to make will reflect a decision not to abandon what she's learned how to do well for a relatively new sphere of activity. [...] I respect her tremendously for her decision to merge the political level of her consciousness into the cultural level.'⁸² In all but name, Hayden was describing what would become Fonda's production company, IPC Films. This cinematic arm of 'working within the system' stood to eclipse his political campaign in the coming years, and rested on the fate of Fonda's return to Hollywood, which would be measured by the success of *Fun with Dick and Jane* (1977).

Assembling Fonda and co-star George Segal under the direction of Ted Kotcheff in a facile caper narrative, *Fun with Dick and Jane* was the first of two films

⁸⁰ Aronowitz, 'Lady Jane', p. 25.

⁸¹ A. H. Weiler, 'News of the Screen', *New York Times* (27 October 1974), p. 63. The projects comprised a 65-minute documentary shot in North Vietnam entitled *Introduction to the Enemy* (1974), a cameo role in George Cukor's *The Bluebird* (1976), an announcement that she was slated to star in *Julia* (1977), and an unrealised drama about the American Revolution to also star Henry and Peter Fonda.

⁸² Hayden quoted in Kasindorf, 'Person of Many Parts', p. 24.

Fonda made before the release of IPC's debut feature (the other being *Julia*, also 1977), that nonetheless provided a solid return at the box office. The film depicts a suburban middle class couple's decline from prosperity, whose sheer desperation to maintain an affluent exterior leads them to commit armed robbery as a means of income – in contrast to Fonda and Hayden's 'openly modest' lifestyle. Film critics noted that the film was a far cry from Fonda's political activities; Stephen Farber wrote in *New West*: 'This is Jane Fonda's first major movie role since her award-winning performance in *Klute* in 1971, and her presence probably encourages one to expect a radical piece of social criticism. The movie has some laughs, but it turns out to be about as radical as an old Doris Day comedy.'⁸³ Similarly, *New Times* critic Richard Corliss suggested *Dick and Jane* was a regressive, undermining career move: 'The convulsions of the sixties might as well have never taken place, for *Dick and Jane* resides in the lecherotic [*sic*] fantasyland Jane Fonda grew up in (movies like *Sunday in New York*, *Any Wednesday* and *Barefoot in the Park*) and, I'd have thought, grew out of.'⁸⁴ Amongst her supporters, however, Fonda secured the backing of John Simon, notable in that he reviewed for both *New York* magazine and the right-wing periodical, *National Review*. In his *New York* notice, Simon concurred with his peers; *Dick and Jane* was frivolous and forgettable with 'amateurish photography'. Yet Simon came out the strongest in favour of Fonda and concluded his review: 'Please, you folks out there in Movieland, stop being mired in your myopia, and find roles for Fonda before it is too late – not for her, for you.'⁸⁵ It was a small indication that the tides of reaction has started to turn.

⁸³ Stephen Farber, 'Radical Chic and the American Dream', *New West* (28 February 1977), p. 77.

⁸⁴ Richard Corliss, 'Thieves Like Us', *New Times* (18 February 1977), p. 78.

⁸⁵ John Simon, 'See Jane Star', *New York* (28 February 1977), p. 54.

In a gesture of reconciliation, which saw Fonda reinstated within Hollywood cinema during 1977, she enacted her role as the ‘redeemed’ political star. Janet Maslin’s *Newsweek* review alluded to the recuperative dimensions of such a light touch comedy: ‘Fonda has never before seemed such a guilelessly attractive comedienne, and her performance may win over those who are put off by her public politics.’⁸⁶ Fonda was at pains to stress, however, that *Fun with Dick and Jane* was satirical comedy that dovetailed with her political agenda. In advance publicity, Fonda asserted the film was a ‘socially conscious’ comedy that commented on ‘a false American Dream’ and offered an opportunity to raise the political consciousness of America’s privileged classes.⁸⁷ Despite critical notices not sharing Fonda’s belief in the film’s subversive potential, her description revealed the political aspirations for mainstream cinema defining IPC Films. On what terms Fonda was being readmitted to the Hollywood fold remained debatable. This was signalled well in advance of the film’s release when the *New York Times* proposed: ‘it is difficult to separate Jane Fonda the actress from Jane Fonda the political activist’.⁸⁸ On this front, the paper provided the answer to its own dilemma: *Dick and Jane* was her ‘homecoming vehicle’ and Fonda was ‘back from the war’.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Jane Fonda’s return to Hollywood in 1977 constituted the initial stage of her attempt to fuse commercial film form with political content. Although her industrial control of

⁸⁶ Janet Maslin, ‘Nouveau Poor’, *Newsweek* (21 February 1977), JFCC/AMPAS.

⁸⁷ John Wilson, ‘Jane Fonda’s Happy Heist’ *New York Times* (11 April 1976), p. D1.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

this process would enlarge under the auspices of her production company in the coming years, Fonda's political identity alone had proven to be of epic proportions in having ostensibly survived a stand-off with Nixon over the debacle of Vietnam. Indeed, the politicisation process that had gripped Fonda's image in an impasse represented her 'master story' for IPC Films, there to be deciphered and retold to the mainstream she sought to mobilise. How does a political innocent become an ideological human being – 'we have to begin to put that image into the mass culture,' Fonda told the *New York Times* in publicising her upcoming film, *Julia*.⁹⁰ Rebellion and dissent had proven fertile yet shaky ground as vital elements of Fonda's lived experience. As 'narratives of dissent', Fonda's upcoming films harboured the potential to vindicate, heroise and politicise the processes of social inquiry, nestled within the confines of commercial-political stardom.

⁹⁰ Judith Weinraub, 'Two Feisty Feminists Filming Hellman's *Pentimento*' *New York Times* (31 October 1976), p. D1.

Chapter Two

Julia (1977): The Year of the Actress

‘Not so long ago, Jane Fonda got top billing on any establishment enemy’s list from Hollywood to Washington. Now the questions, in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, are no longer about patriotism but about performances.’

Desmond Ryan, ‘Jane on *Julia*’, *Philadelphia Inquirer*
(14 October 1977), p. 3.

‘Mr. Zinnemann has never been considered on-the-track by the auteur critics, possibly because he is a meticulous craftsman who sidesteps flashy techniques, a director who feels that his private personality is not something to be applied like a bumper sticker, turning every film he makes into a Zinnemann vehicle.’

Guy Flatley, ‘*Julia* Stirs Images of Other Films for Zinnemann’, *New York Times* (30 September 1977), p. 55.

‘*Julia* is a rite of passage: it shows the formation of character and sensibility under the influence of others in one’s life.’

Jack Kroll, ‘Hollywood’s New Heroines’,
Newsweek (10 October 1977), p. 79.

Introduction

Jane Fonda and Richard Nixon exhibited mutual antagonism during the early-1970s. Nixon's ensuing downfall enhanced the recuperation of prominent liberal figures and for Fonda this process vindicated her well publicised criticisms of Nixon's integrity, which she had couched within America's New Left political movement. Fonda's mainstream repositioning after Vietnam and Watergate was augmented by her timely return to commercial filmmaking: come the late-1970s Hollywood was making films depicting feminist concerns, some of which Fonda had espoused earlier in the decade. Indeed, the American press touted 1977 a renaissance year for Hollywood actresses in general.¹ Notable parts for women were largely sidelined during the early-1970s; buddy movies and disaster epics, for example, had crowded out complex female characterisations, effectively overlooking the women's movement.² These cinematic trends ran parallel to Fonda's 'greylisted period' after *Klute* (1971); similarly, Fonda's recuperating political persona overlapped with Hollywood's market developments when movies represented feminism in mainstream form. With 1977 a watershed year for 'women's cinema', Fonda's return to commercial filmmaking and Hollywood's courting of female audiences formed a nexus of politics and stardom. This process of rehabilitation mutually reinforced the social legitimacy of both industry and star; Fonda's symbiotic relationship with Hollywood had implications for the commercial viability of political filmmaking, demonstrating the mainstream potential of feminist narratives in a period otherwise renowned for blockbusters. In its broadest sense,

¹ Charles Michener, 'Year of the Actress', *Newsweek* (14 February 1977), pp. 56-66; Jane Wilson, 'Hollywood Flirts with the New Woman', *New York Times* (29 May 1977), pp. 1, 11, 24; Kroll, 'Hollywood's New Heroines', pp. 78-87.

² Ryan and Kellner, *Camera Politica*, pp. 136-137.

Fonda's recuperation formed part of the transient liberal political consensus rallied by Watergate and Vietnam: as Carter led the Democrats back into the White House, Fonda cultivated her political stardom through Hollywood's commercial forms.

The key film for analysing the emergence of Fonda's 'commercial-political' star persona is the historical drama *Julia*, starring Fonda as the liberal playwright Lillian Hellman and Vanessa Redgrave as Julia, a privileged childhood friend of Hellman's who becomes a freedom fighter in Europe during the rise of fascism. Made with high production values and distributed by Twentieth Century Fox, *Julia* immortalised Hellman's brush with the antifascist movement in Europe during the inter-war years and was based on a chapter from *Pentimento* (1973), Hellman's memoirs of the 1930s.³ It was a key film of 1977 as it garnered popular interest in the 'women's cinema' renaissance through the political associations of its stars and its subject. This chapter explores the impact of Fonda's star image on *Julia* using a concept of 'assigned authorship': the film became principally associated with Fonda due to the political themes of its media coverage, mainstream interest in feminism, and reportage profiling Fonda's return to dramatic art. Furthermore, extra-textual phenomena politicised *Julia* in conjunction with Fonda's star persona; specifically, the juxtaposition of Fonda with Hellman in the press (and in the case of the film the *merger* of these personae) is proposed as dignifying Fonda's hitherto *infamously* radical political persona. Fonda's activist image represented an authorial challenge to director Fred Zinnemann's ideological conception of *Julia*, and this is discussed using the film's unpublished production files. Press coverage amplified this politicisation process and constituted a wider signifier of Fonda's rehabilitating stardom: *Julia's*

³ Lillian Hellman, *Pentimento* (London: Little Brown, 1973).

mainstream critical reception, subsequently discussed, expounds this. An emergent theme of the film's reception was how Fonda's tempered politics compared with co-star Vanessa Redgrave's radicalism. This is positioned as a 'decisive' endorsement of Fonda's return to Hollywood stardom, as Redgrave represented a radical yardstick for Fonda's overtures to the American mainstream and thus further enhanced her recuperative trajectory. Hollywood's redemptive representational framework permeates this saga; its films have long favoured the creation of individual heroes and, notably in this case, heroines – of various types. When *Newsweek* announced 1977 as 'The Year of the Actress', Fonda became its unofficial envoy, suggesting that the slogan referred to her present and onward journey.

Contexts: 1970s Hollywood, women's cinema and the women's movement

During the 1970s Hollywood films exhibited a volatile relationship with contemporaneous socio-political events and movements. Although the decade witnessed the rise of escapist blockbusters (e.g. *Jaws* [1975]), this period has conversely been championed for offering interrogative portraits of American institutions, such as the Presidency. Indeed, representing 'reality' – or escaping from it – has provided with Hollywood source material throughout its history. The corollary of this concept in an industrial context exposes the processes of 'selecting' realities as commercially viable for representation at any given point in time. In 1976, for example, Hollywood dramatised Watergate in *All the President's Men*, released twenty months after Nixon's resignation. The proximity of the film to the scandal and its use of stock footage featuring Nixon and his aides has been described by historian

David Cook as endowed with ‘the currency of “instant history,”’⁴ obscuring the temporal lag of the film’s development, production and distribution processes. Hollywood thus maintained a social relevance with its relatively instantaneous depiction of Watergate and concurrently satisfied its economic requirements.⁵ The film is a prime example of transmuting political content into conventional form.⁶ Hollywood provisionally disregarded the decade’s other key events, however, such as Vietnam and the women’s movement (representation of which did not significantly occur until the late-1970s) confirming Hollywood’s tenacious ability to conceal as well as instantaneously represent social and political realities.⁷ In 1977, the *New York Times* announced, nevertheless, Hollywood’s production slate tackling these issues:

Scanning the list of films scheduled for release within the coming year, one surmises that not only will moviegoers have a chance to see the Vietnam War refought [*sic*] and rethought but – even more wondrous – we will bear witness to the cinematic rebirth of the female segment of the nation.⁸

This horizon of films concerning war and women suggested Hollywood was pursuing socially relevant avenues in a sustained fashion. Such market developments constituted a restorative mechanism for Fonda’s stardom as anti-war activism and feminism were two movements she had been publicly associated with in the early-1970s. Fonda’s calculated return to mainstream filmmaking therefore became both an

⁴ Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. 201.

⁵ Ibid, p. 500. The film placed fourth at the American box office in 1976.

⁶ Hollywood sided with the liberal heroism of Woodward and Bernstein, asserting the effectiveness of individuals against a corrupt regime. *All the President’s Men*, however, portrayed Watergate as an aberrant episode, suggesting a conventional belief in the *essence* of the American system. This exemplified the film’s suture of commercial and political concerns.

⁷ The Vietnam exception is the propagandistic John Wayne vehicle, *The Green Berets* (1968). This was swiftly regarded as incongruent with public perceptions of the war, however, due to its uncritical stance toward the conflict.

⁸ Guy Flatley, ‘Film: Of Women and Vietnam’, *New York Times* (28 August 1977), pp. 66-67.

emblem and a catalyst for the improving fortunes of Hollywood actresses, in conjunction with the following industrial and cultural factors.

Hollywood's neglect of female characters had proven at odds with America's contemporaneous feminist movement, particularly given television's burgeoning representations. By the late-1970s, redressing the balance of women's roles was a pressing concern and, in industrial terms, potentially profitable. Television had proven fertile ground for attracting loyal female viewers and women-centred programmes proliferated during the 1970s. Shows such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-1977), *One Day at a Time* (1975-1984), *Maude* (1972-1978), *Rhoda* (1974-1978), *Phyllis* (1975-1977) and *Alice* (1976-1985), revealed television audiences poised for a renaissance of cinematic female roles. Hollywood's reinstatement of onscreen heroines in this light was eagerly anticipated yet its execution was a distinctly measured process of supply and demand.

Of Hollywood's major studios, Twentieth Century Fox commissioned audience research targeting female viewers. Fox then spearheaded a slate of self-proclaimed 'women's pictures', breaking with cinematic content of the decade, but remaining loyal to its commercial forms. Some Hollywood cinema of the early-1970s had challenged the industry's formal conventions by exhibiting a greater emphasis on 'artistic' filmmaking but these narratives typically explored the angst and interior lives of male characters.⁹ More commercial genres had also relegated female roles to

⁹ These films formed part of Hollywood's so-called 'artistic renaissance', which largely favoured auteur-led cinema. See, for example, Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (Oxford: OUP, 2000 [1980]).

a supporting mechanism rather than a central concern.¹⁰ The commercial model, having largely overrun artistic filmmaking in Hollywood by 1977 (high gloss spectacles of the year included *Airport '77* and *The Deep*), co-opted narratives courting America's female audiences. Fox's output of 1977 thus exemplified Hollywood's market trends, distributing both spectacular (e.g. *Star Wars*), and socially relevant narratives, in commercial form. Indeed, the studio's bankrolling of women's cinema was couched squarely within an economic context. Gareth Wigan, Fox's Vice President for Production in 1977, suggested this output strategy and his expendability would be mutually dependant: 'now audiences seem to be more interested in personal situations, in relationships *they've* had. If I'm wrong, don't check with me a year from now. I won't be here.'¹¹ Star performers headlined more ambitious 'women's pictures', reflecting Hollywood's fiscal equation of 'big' names with box office success. In *The Turning Point* (1977), set in the world of ballet, Shirley MacLaine and Anne Bancroft played two women who had taken contrasting paths toward their careers and families. Bancroft played the lonely prima ballerina opposite MacLaine's ballerina-turned-frustrated-mother, suggesting these 'mutually exclusive' choices of career or family were equally dissatisfying for women. Even without stars of this magnitude, films like *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) dramatised in familiar narrative form the identity crisis a woman (Jill Clayburgh) experiences when she is left by her husband for his mistress. Women's issues proved a sound investment for Fox: *The Turning Point* secured \$17.1m in domestic rentals, becoming the studio's third biggest film of 1977 behind *Star Wars* and the Mel Brooks vehicle, *High Anxiety*.¹² The women's cinema renaissance of 1977 constituted a shift in thematic

¹⁰ During the 1970s, 73 per cent of featured and supporting roles in Hollywood went to men. Source: Kathleen Nolan, Screen Actors Guild president, interviewed for Michener, 'Year of the Actress', p. 56.

¹¹ Gareth Wigan quoted in Michener, 'Year of the Actress', p. 61.

¹² Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. 501.

currents but remained constrained by the dictates of a Hollywood feature's form and profit motive. *Julia*, released through Fox, initially resided in this industrial context.

Hollywood's revival of women's cinema saw actresses proliferate onscreen yet the industry's power base remained definitively male. Stardom constituted the principal apparatus for women to engage with and 'speak through' Hollywood cinema and actresses appeared in films depicting women's contemporaneous 'reality'. Although these narratives were industrially progressive for the 1970s, the topics chosen reflected caution. Jane Wilson claimed in the *New York Times* that *The Turning Point* and *An Unmarried Woman* were the cinematic corollaries of already familiar inquiries into women's identities, careers and family life:

The basic themes of these two films have been explored endlessly in recent novels, in magazines and newspaper articles, in prime-time TV sitcoms, and even by Government agencies in search of solutions to the problem of 'The Displaced Homemaker'.¹³

Repackaging women's issues into films directed by men irked Wilson and reflected a desire for female authorship in Hollywood: 'How is it that a couple of male directors have laid their hands with all the excitement of novitiates on two of the oldest and most exhausted topics of discussion among contemporary women?'¹⁴ Female directors like Lee Grant (better known for her acting career) were developing films during in Hollywood this period but the directorial profession remained disproportionately male. Literary works by women featuring central female characters

¹³ Jane Wilson, 'Hollywood Flirts With the New Woman', *New York Times* (29 May 1977), p. 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

were also intercepted by the male-dominated structure of Hollywood. Judith Rossner's 1975 bestseller, *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, was adapted and released through Paramount in October 1977 with Richard Brooks directing. Diane Keaton played the self-destructive lead, Theresa Dunn, augmenting her repertoire vis-à-vis the earlier release of *Annie Hall*, in April 1977. These back-to-back portraits of contemporary New York women elicited commentary on Keaton's stardom as offering 'one portrait – somewhat eccentric, to be sure, but nonetheless lifelike – of Adult Woman, circa 1977'.¹⁵ Stardom thus represented a more viable means of authorship for a Hollywood actress such as Keaton during this period, a point previously contemplated by Jane Fonda.¹⁶

Fonda's return to mainstream filmmaking and the re-ascendance of women's cinema in Hollywood became decisively linked by the autumn of 1977. *Fun with Dick and Jane*, marketed and released as a 'socially conscious' comedy in February 1977, had constituted Fonda's comeback vehicle, proving she could enhance – rather than hinder – performance at the box office. Fonda's cultural presence ran deeper than the moderate borders of the film's social satire, nonetheless, and *Julia* reveals this. Her return to Hollywood acting was depicted as a positive omen for actresses generally. *Newsweek* suggested in February 1977 that Fonda's career revival would be catalytic for the profession and publicised, moreover, her views on Hollywood's changing representation of women:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fonda was profiled in 1975 by *Cinéaste* within an issue themed 'the star as auteur'. See Dan Georgakas, "'I Prefer Films that Strengthen People': An Interview With Jane Fonda", *Cinéaste* (Summer 1975), pp. 2-9.

We're in a period of transition. The '50s and '60s stereotype woman's role is no longer plausible. The people who finance films aren't sure what women's films might make money because the new image of women isn't clear. [...] We're now in a vacuum in terms of what's going to replace the old stereotypes.¹⁷

This *Newsweek* commentary was both forward-looking and retrospective: it elevated Fonda as an 'expert witness' regarding Hollywood's struggle to evolve in tandem with the media's representation of women, yet concurrently echoed issues of identity specific to her star image. The 'implausibility' of 1960s female stereotypes coded her previous ingénue and sex kitten personae within a summation of limits placed on stars in general. Fonda's return to Hollywood – replete with a new identity – and the changing presence of actresses within the industry thus forged an emblematic connection at this early stage in journalism profiling 'New Women's Cinema'. Mainstream cinematic interest in feminism revitalised actresses' careers just as Fonda sought to depict feminist characters on the Hollywood screen: factors that were mutually reinforcing.

In other publications, female stars' identities were ostensibly demystified in articles exploring the contradictory gains of feminism. Even traditional women's journalism pondered 'New Hollywood' actresses like Fonda and how their experiences correlated with the status of American women. 'To be a young woman in the 1970s is to be a maker of choices', wrote Claire Safran in *Redbook*, a monthly magazine popular with housewives. Introducing a transcript conversation between

¹⁷ Fonda quoted in Michener, 'Year of the Actress', p. 61.

actresses Candice Bergen, Karen Black, Marlo Thomas and Fonda discussing topics like motherhood, careers, and male-female relations, Safran mused, ‘How do you choose from among the old values and the new? [...] How do you keep each “yes” from turning into a “no” to some other dream?’¹⁸ By highlighting communal women’s issues within the deliberations of stars, *Redbook* assessed whether women of special privilege experienced the same problems as ‘everyday women’ of America. This approach, in a publication as mainstream as *Redbook*, is crucial to discussions of Fonda’s star persona during this period: the sustained efforts of Fonda and Tom Hayden to domesticate her glamour and her politics (as discussed in chapter 1) centralised processes that used stardom as a tool for representing the proposed ‘mutual’ concerns of Fonda and her intended audiences, foremost of which was the depiction of a ‘conventional’ woman’s political awakening both on and off-screen. It is crucial to note, therefore, Fonda’s frequent sermons detailing her personal growth and change, conceived in political brushstrokes. The *Redbook* article was typical in this regard:

I felt lonely a lot for the first thirty years of my life. And then I realized that the problems in my life were not just personal problems peculiar to me, but that they were the result of broader cultural and social problems that could be changed. [...] I feel that if *I* could change, anyone can [original emphasis].¹⁹

The mixture of personal and political concerns anchoring this statement was reminiscent of the wider blurring of life and art that typified Fonda’s persona during the early-1970s. Playing Bree Daniel in *Klute*, Fonda explored her character’s

¹⁸ Claire Safran, ‘Four Successful Women Talk About What They Want – And Can’t Have’, *Redbook* (February 1977), p. 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

turbulent female identity whilst concurrently identifying as a ‘feminist’ in reality. As a political star returning to Hollywood in 1977, an industry ready to represent women’s issues in commercial form, Fonda’s emphasis on personal and political change reflected attempts by ordinary women to reconcile the political gains of feminism into their everyday lives. Grappling with this contradiction was a recurring motif of Fonda’s media persona, as conveyed in articles collapsing Jane Fonda ‘the woman’ with Jane Fonda ‘the actress’.²⁰ Indeed, blurring these identities constituted a dramaturgical blueprint for her future characters’ trajectories toward politicisation: playing Lillian Hellman in *Julia* represented a primary and ‘historical’ case in point.

Jane Fonda and Lillian Hellman

Julia depicts Lillian Hellman’s lifelong relationship with the political activist of its title, and is set against the rise of fascism in 1930s Europe.²¹ One of the film’s themes addresses the playwright’s embrace of political action through humanitarianism, suggesting a point of origin for Hellman’s subsequent ‘political conscience’ of the 1950s. Playing Hellman onscreen, during a period when the playwright was being celebrated for her antifascism and staunch opposition to the subsequent domestic crisis of McCarthyism, was for Fonda an exercise that fell somewhere between a masterstroke and serendipity. Hellman as a personality had regained popularity during the 1970s, impacting positively on Fonda’s own recuperative process. Although known principally as a playwright, by the late-1960s Hellman had turned to writing her memoirs, finding favour with the public and many critics alike. *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973) and *Scoundrel Time* (1976) recounted Hellman’s

²⁰ Fred Robbins, ‘Jane Fonda, the Woman’, *Vogue* (November 1977), pp 286-287, 322-323.

²¹ I shall refer hereafter to the cinematic character of Lillian Hellman as played by Fonda in *Julia* as ‘Lillian’ and the actual personage of Lillian Hellman as ‘Hellman’.

experiences living through key episodes of America's political history, including the HUAC hearings of the early-1950s, which the latter volume encompasses.²² Utilising the Fifth Amendment when appearing before HUAC, Hellman delivered the memorable but somewhat damning declaration 'I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions.'²³ These memoirs garnered Hellman a cachet in feminist circles and with the young who admired her integrity. By the mid-1970s, this cachet had translated to accolades, notably for her person rather than her creative output. The New York University Alumnae Club voted Hellman woman of the year in 1973, and the same year the New Jersey branch of the American Civil Liberties Union recognised her 'outstanding contributions to civil liberties.'²⁴ Hellman's resurgence as a political luminary reminded the American public of liberalism's 'heroic' potential in the face of shameful episodes, especially McCarthyism. Fonda's public opposition to Nixon, especially in the aftermath of Watergate, suggested Hellman and Fonda occupied overlapping terrain as heroines of the 'Old' and 'New' Left.

Hellman's memoirs depicted her as a marginalised figure of protest against McCarthyism, comparable to Fonda's conspicuous opposition to the Vietnam War. Indeed, the Julia chapter of *Pentimento*, principally set in the years preceding the Second World War, depicted radical activism as a recurrent social movement, not least tied to the history of fighting fascism. *Julia* was thus predisposed to remind audiences that 'instinctive' heroism also existed in female form, a point connecting Fonda's activism to weightier historical precursors. With its publication year of 1976, *Scoundrel Time* benefited from the post-Watergate national mood particularly as this

²² Lillian Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman* (London: Little Brown, 1969); Hellman, *Scoundrel Time* (London: Little Brown, 1976).

²³ Author uncredited, 'Lillian Hellman Balks House Unit', *New York Times* (22 May 1952), p. 15.

²⁴ Bernard Dick, *Hellman in Hollywood* (London: Associated University Presses, 1982), p. 136.

volume dealt with Hollywood's red-baiting period. Concurrently, Fonda's stance against the Nixon administration was discussed in interviews charting her re-ascendancy, opportunely coinciding with *Julia*'s release. Hollywood itself had also been hostile territory; Fonda claimed in *Vogue*: 'there were a lot of movie producers who tried to keep me from getting roles. It was like living in the McCarthy Era.'²⁵ Citing the machinations of the Republican Right in both Fonda's and Hellman's scenarios thus constituted a form of mutually reinforcing cultural currency. This elucidates producer Richard Roth's published account of approaching Fonda for *Julia*, whom he likened to Hellman in the fashion magazine *Women's Wear Daily* as representing 'a kind of moral force [...] she does what's right'.²⁶ In short, Fonda was the beneficiary of Hellman's morally charged 'liberal glamour'.

The cinematic execution of *Julia* honoured its source material by foregrounding Lillian Hellman as both a character and memoirist. The film is structured around a series of flashbacks and is thus presented as Lillian's story to tell according to the vagaries of her recollections. This is signalled at the outset by Fonda's voiceover as Lillian, whom the viewer assumes is the lone, hunched figure featured onscreen sat in a fishing boat. The voiceover denotes Lillian is an elderly woman recounting her experiences from memory, which is represented by a customary metaphorical segue of rippling water. The setting shifts to a train departing a station in long shot, a sequence later repeated and revealed to be the start of Lillian's fateful journey from Paris to Moscow by way of Berlin; indeed, *Julia*'s political and cinematic virtuosity clusters within this expedition. After a second watery segue the film returns to an extreme close-up of Lillian's eyes as she continues her voiceover,

²⁵ Robbins, 'Jane Fonda, the Woman', p. 322.

²⁶ Susan Smith, 'Julia: Jane Fonda to the Front', *Women's Wear Daily* (4 January 1977), p. 64.

underlining that the images of *Julia* are assigned to Lillian's recollection of past events. While the film commences with an image of Lillian that is frail in body, the robustness of her memory is emphasised shortly thereafter with the line delivered in voiceover 'I trust absolutely what I remember about Julia'.

When *Julia* was released in October 1977, the spectacle of Fonda-as-Lillian was deemed mutually beneficial for both women by *The Atlantic*, as Fonda's portrayal ostensibly made Hellman a heroine to audiences unfamiliar with her literary works.²⁷ Adopting the role of an historical (and living) personage meant Fonda could represent the construction of a familiar political identity onscreen. It is little wonder, therefore, that she was drawn to this role. Fonda experienced her own political awakening several years earlier, in the process exploring the pitfalls of mixing fame with politics, and the *Pentimento* chapter sketched the beginnings of Hellman's political consciousness amidst the turmoil of 1930s Europe. Hollywood, moreover, had begun to depict the women's movement and Vietnam (events Fonda had been publicly linked to), indicating that political narratives and characters were in vogue. The trajectory of Fonda's role is particularly notable as playing Lillian represented an opportunity to depict the process of becoming embroiled in a cause rather than playing an already committed political activist, which Fonda remained in 1977. Despite the prevailing Hollywood climate being amenable to playing developed political characters, Fonda sidestepped the role of Julia, the more 'politically glamorous' of the two leads. This was an approach to acting that Fonda discussed in *Time* magazine and coincided with *Julia*'s release, hinting at further studies of accessible 'politicised women': 'I'm not interested in playing committed, way-out

²⁷ Martin Knelman, 'Starring...The Writer', *The Atlantic*, (November 1977), p. 96.

liberated women. I think most people aren't like that, and that the value of movies is to have characters that people can identify with and relate to.'²⁸ This disassociation with fully formed ideological characters moderated her radical associations and constituted a direct appeal for re-popularising the political qualities of her star persona as bound up with the 'ordinary' or 'everyday'.

In the greater scheme of Fonda's recuperation, playing Lillian suggested that Fonda's left-wing politics had 'ancestral' links to the efforts of Hellman's liberal cohort of the pre- and post-war years. 'Jane Fonda is to our generation very much what Lillian Hellman was to hers – an artist aware of her own anger, confused by her own capacity for caring,' wrote Rob Baker in *Soho Weekly News*.²⁹ Fonda's status as a political actress and activist was dignified and historicised by virtue of her proximity to Hellman, specifically in 1977.³⁰ This extra-textual feature of the film was largely symbiotic, and indicates the power and currency of Fonda's political image. Placed in a production context, Fred Zinnemann's sustained attempts to regulate the political associations of *Julia* bears out and magnifies the wider import and impact of Fonda's activist past.

²⁸ Author uncredited, 'Growing Fonda of Jane: The Rebel Has Mellowed', *Time* (3 October 1977), p. 36.

²⁹ Rob Baker, 'Jane Fonda as Lillian Hellman: An Angry Radical's Coming-of-Age', *Soho Weekly News* (6 October 1977), p. 23.

³⁰ Fonda played Hellman during a period of popular acclaim for the playwright, whom had otherwise courted considerable controversy. Hellman's popularity in the 1970s, however, did not weather well in the 1980s. Her ongoing feud with the author and critic Mary McCarthy reached new heights in 1980 when McCarthy appeared on the Dick Cavett show, describing Hellman as a dishonest writer, whose every word is 'a lie, including "and" and "the".' McCarthy's hostility reflected a wider swathe of intellectual suspicion toward Hellman, especially regarding her inflated 'heroism' during the (Joseph) McCarthy trials. The literary feud became a legal matter when Hellman brought a suit against McCarthy, which collapsed shortly after Hellman's death in 1984. See Michiko Kakutani, 'Hellman-McCarthy Libel Suit Stirs Old Antagonisms', *New York Times* (9 March 1980), p. C21 and Dick, *Hellman in Hollywood*, pp. 153-155.

Production vs. publicity: the politicisation of *Julia*

Jane Fonda's star image exerted a politicising influence on *Julia*'s place in the American media, a factor that constituted a challenge to Zinnemann and Fox's visions for the film. '*Julia* is not a political film, but certainly everyone who sees it will know the politics of the people who made it', suggested Vanessa Redgrave in a *Los Angeles Times* article from 1976.³¹ This statement succinctly revealed the evocative undertow of *Julia* and identified, moreover, contradictions inherent in a political star like Fonda working within the commercial format of Hollywood features. Fonda's presence in *Julia* generated pre-release journalism debating whether politics would be a core theme of the film, attention that Zinnemann and Fox's publicity team privately attempted to assuage.

The opposing positions of the press and the studio regarding *Julia*'s status as a political picture exemplified the volatility of Fonda's star persona in a commercial context. She had joined the project during its primary stages in 1975, becoming part of the deal producer Roth was attempting to broker with a Hollywood studio. In this sense, her star power maintained legitimacy with political associations intact: with Sydney Pollack initially attached to direct, the star-director team replicated the formula of Fonda's 1969 film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, largely considered her first 'political' picture. This suggested that Hollywood was willing to reassemble a creative collaboration linked to Fonda's years of radical awakening. Yet production files for *Julia* reveal that Fox and Zinnemann (announced to direct in March 1976) considered Fonda's political persona something to be 'contained' rather than

³¹ Mary Blume, 'A Friendship for All Seasons in *Julia*', *Los Angeles Times* (26 December 1976), p. 48.

headlined, a battle eventually conceded due largely to press attention positioning the film as a political work.

Julia's casting process was an early indicator of Zinnemann's proclivity toward commercialising the film and contextualises his unease over Fonda's political stardom. With Fonda attached to star in the film, Zinnemann perceived the need for an accomplished actress to play Julia and give the movie its best chances at the box office.³² In notes dated 26 March, 1976, Zinnemann and the film's casting director, Juliet Taylor, banded such star names as Faye Dunaway, Glenda Jackson and Genevieve Bujold, all of whom had been nominated for Oscars, with Jackson winning twice for *Women in Love* (1969) and *A Touch of Class* (1973). A further annotated copy of this memo reveals Zinnemann's ranking of the actresses with Dunaway the forerunner, followed by Bujold, Jill Clayburgh, Charlotte Rampling, Diane Keaton, and the newcomer, Meryl Streep. All other contenders were struck through, including Redgrave.³³ The initial favouring of Dunaway reflected her appeal in conventional genre pieces (*The Towering Inferno* [1974]) and *auteur*-driven cinema (*Bonnie and Clyde* [1967]; *Chinatown* [1974]) suggesting Zinnemann wanted to counterbalance Fonda's political stardom with the ostensible cross-market success of Dunaway's box office record.

The eventual casting of Redgrave as Julia, which was announced in June 1976, proved a crucial decision by influencing the evolution and tone of the film's publicity. Dunaway claims in her memoirs that Fonda was not only actively involved in

³² The 'bankability' of Fonda's stardom was in doubt during 1976. Her 1973 film, *A Doll's House*, directed by Joseph Losey, had not received American distribution and this was rumoured to be because of her involvement. *Fun with Dick and Jane* was yet to be released.

³³ 'Casting Notes' (26 March 1976), file 457, box 36. Fred Zinnemann papers, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, USA [hereafter FZ/AMPAS].

developing the project, but also ‘offered’ her the role of Julia before the part went to Redgrave.³⁴ Zinnemann’s casting notes reveal a more intriguing counter-narrative insofar as Hellman had initially proposed Redgrave to Juliet Taylor after seeing her on Broadway in Ibsen’s play, *The Lady From the Sea*, during spring, 1976. Zinnemann’s papers reveal that neither he nor Taylor had independently suggested Redgrave as a viable choice and her early dismissal, discussed above, implies the reasons for Redgrave’s reinstatement and eventual securing of the role rested principally with Hellman’s interest and intervention.³⁵ Zinnemann thus faced authorial challenges in relation to the film’s construction on a numbers of fronts.

Preceding the official publicity campaign, press accounts of *Julia* assumed the extra-textual associations of its stars would influence the film’s wider meaning. A year before *Julia* was released, articles offered opposing versions of whether the film should or could be considered a political work. Whereas the *New York Times* reported ‘Zinnemann and the two stars insist there is no political statement or undertone to the film,’³⁶ the *Los Angeles Times* emphasised the divisions between their standpoints on the same issue.³⁷ In the absence of a specific marketing campaign during the autumn of 1976, and without a viewing print of the film in circulation, these articles represented an unsanctioned deliberation over the meaning and political dimensions of *Julia*. This process, from the perspective of *auteur* theory and star studies, is striking: without the film as ‘text’ to work from, journalists focused on the project’s

³⁴ Faye Dunaway, *Looking for Gatsby: My Life* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), pp. 320-321.

³⁵ Hellman was consulted on drafts of the script, over which she apparently felt she had power of veto. In response to early scenes of Lillian looking for Julia’s baby, which were eventually shifted to the end of the film, Hellman wrote to Zinnemann demanding: ‘This absolutely must be changed.’ These papers form part of ‘Lillian Hellman’ (notes undated), file 491, box 38. FZ/AMPAS.

³⁶ Judith Weinraub, ‘Two Feisty Feminists Filming Hellman’s *Pentimento*’, *New York Times* (31 October 1976), p. D1.

³⁷ Blume, ‘A Friendship for All Seasons’, p. 48.

associative elements to provide an angle for their work. The star images of Fonda and Redgrave, evocative of contemporaneous political causes, thus offered context and tone for *Julia* by proxy, a point enhanced by post-release articles profiling the actresses differing political agendas. Conversely, Zinnemann was not considered a ‘great’ American director (unlike John Ford, for example) so his authorial impact on *Julia* was ostensibly weaker, as interest in its two stars would indicate. This aspect likely occurred to Zinnemann as he sought to contain any further reportage afforded the film that veered toward politics. In publicity files for *Julia* from January 1977, Zinnemann’s memoranda to the Public Relations team revealed this as a collective strategy: ‘I think we all agreed that we should make sure that *Julia* is not regarded as a political picture and this point should be made indirectly, but consistently.’³⁸ It is also clear that Zinnemann perceived Fonda as the weak link in this process, prone to aggrandising her political agenda: ‘There is just one important thing I would suggest: if possible, all the people who are about to interview Jane should be asked to avoid questions about politics.’³⁹ In attempting to control the questions posed to Fonda, Zinnemann simultaneously revealed deference to her potential impact on the film’s message, an impact nonetheless lauded by many journalistic commentators.

The publicity team at Fox remained preoccupied with monitoring Fonda’s presence in the American media throughout the months preceding *Julia*’s release. In one of many letters between Zinnemann and Johnny Friedkin, director of advertising, publicity and promotion at Fox, the executive reported: ‘As we discussed, Jane

³⁸ Letter from Zinnemann to Pat Newcomb, Pickwick Public Relations Inc., NY (12 January 1977), ‘Publicity Correspondence, 1976-1977’, file 514, box 39. FZ/AMPAS.

³⁹ Ibid.

Fonda's image is really changing for the better with the U.S. press.'⁴⁰ Fonda's comeback year had indeed been enthusiastically trumpeted by multiple magazines (especially targeting women), including cover appearances or scheduled appearances on such titles as *Newsweek*, *Us*, *Ms.* and *McCall's*. *People* magazine featured a cover of Fonda with the headline 'America Loves Her Again' suggesting her return to Hollywood had proved gainful in manifold ways.⁴¹ Zinnemann, nevertheless, remained ever-cautious of Fonda's political persona and sent a confidential letter to Friedkin expressing this concern:

It seems that Jane – perhaps without realizing it has been using the interviews which have been set up for her by us in order to advance her own political program [...] I strongly believe this type of interview is not helpful or perhaps even counter-productive insofar as *Julia* is concerned.⁴²

This letter, copied to studio heads at Fox, proposed that 'someone in the top echelon' raise the issue with Fonda and decisively limit her to discussions of the film. Friedkin's response urged caution in enforcing any gagging order, suggesting that interviewers – in the absence of a viewing copy of the film – should have limited access to Fonda rather than a situation emphasising the reverse. Indeed, Friedkin asserted that the availability of a viewing copy of *Julia* would allay any political content of interviews with Fonda: 'Fred, I also believe that when Jane sees the film, that's what she, too, will want to discuss.'⁴³ This reveals a gross misjudgement on the

⁴⁰ Letter from Johnny Friedkin to Fred Zinnemann (5 April 1977), 'Publicity Correspondence, 1976-1977', file 514, box 39. FZ/AMPAS.

⁴¹ *People* (16 May 1977).

⁴² Letter from Fred Zinnemann to Johnny Friedkin (25 April 1977), 'Publicity Correspondence, 1976-1977', file 154, box 39. FZ/AMPAS.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

part of Friedkin and the studio regarding the media's fascination with Fonda's political associations. The American press had proven (and would prove) complicit in discussions of Fonda's political agenda, so that the film was thrown into relief against the star's wider manifesto. *Julia* was packaged and delivered in the best traditions of the 'Old Hollywood' sensibilities yet Fonda's fiercely contemporary image drew journalists into her star persona's political orbit, undoubtedly a symbol of the 'New Hollywood'.⁴⁴

The curious postscript to Zinnemann's concern over Fonda's political appropriation of *Julia* is the incongruent production notes released by Fox, which rather than detouring political content, candidly included Fonda narrating her radical past. Distributed to journalists in advance of the film's release to generate press coverage, the notes stressed the representation of female friendship as the film's core, whilst explicitly citing the actresses' activist backgrounds. Fonda's statements within the notes demonstrated this dichotomy; on the one hand she enacted *Julia*'s marketing overtures to female audiences by situating the film's unique place in her career:

This is the first time I've been in a film in which there is a close and supportive relationship with another woman. Julia and Lillian are a pair of intelligent, deeply committed women and one of them dies for her beliefs.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Articles immediately prior to *Julia*'s release suggest Zinnemann's desire that Fonda contain her political opinions was indeed thwarted as she engaged in discussions using *Julia* as a platform. *Women's Wear Daily*, for example, reported: 'Changing her life has changed Fonda as an actress. On screen she plays women who reveal their own strong political awareness. [...] Fonda plays women who are courageously grappling with political systems.' Mary Rourke, 'Jane and Vanessa and Lillian and *Julia*', *Women's Wear Daily* (19 September 1977), p. 24.

⁴⁵ Jane Fonda quoted in 'Production Notes', *Julia* microfiche, AMPAS.

This ostensibly complied with Zinnemann's conception of *Julia* as a work of historical drama, stressing foremost the emotional dimension of the film's socio-political setting. Yet the production notes also emphasised Fonda and Redgrave's activist connection, likely in service to their onscreen relationship – a theme relayed by subsequent articles. Portraying the women as the firebrands of their respective families, the notes explicitly referred to Fonda's activism during the Vietnam War. She recounted the ideological division – and reconciliation – between herself and her father, Henry:

My father was a Second World War veteran and like other men of his generation, he felt the movement against the war was unpatriotic. Eventually he said: 'If you can prove to me what you are saying is true – then I'll back you all the way.' So I did. I took G.I.'s home to the house to relate their horrendous experiences in Vietnam to him and finally my father was convinced that Americans had no right to be there.⁴⁶

Given the opposition Zinnemann expressed over allowing the film's political dimension to emerge, it seems extraordinary that Fonda's experiences of Vietnam were discussed so explicitly in the production notes the studio distributed for *Julia*. This topic remained the flashpoint of her political life and thus could potentially impact on any audience share the film received. Conventional wisdom at Fox must have shifted dramatically and sought to utilise Fonda's political associations as a 'sensational' aspect of the film, conceding that the star's return to Hollywood had

⁴⁶ Ibid.

been a keenly and widely anticipated event in and of itself. Indeed, the American media's reception of her comeback, discussed above, had proved a favourable 'acid test' of her activist agenda. These factors, in conjunction with the political slant applied to *Julia* by the media during the early stages of the film's production, thus conceivably influenced Fox's profiling of Fonda's political persona in the final version of *Julia*'s production notes, distributed to the press. This, in turn, implicitly endorsed politically themed coverage of *Julia*: Fox, through Friedkin, all but weighted the film in Fonda's favour against the apolitical agenda of Fred Zinnemann. The ensuing press reception *Julia* received constituted a barometer for Fonda's star image on a national level and the degree to which her political persona could reconcile with America's wider culture, beyond the confines of Hollywood.

Reception: *Julia* and the nation's critical press

A large feature of Fonda's comeback was her desire to appeal to 'mainstream' America.⁴⁷ Published reviews of *Julia* reveal differences of opinion, however, between the New York critical establishment and a large proportion of the nation's media. Whereas the critiques of New Yorkers Pauline Kael, Vincent Canby, Molly Haskell and Andrew Sarris disparage the film, more provincial critics praised *Julia*'s ode to anti-fascism, the elder statesman-like direction of Fred Zinnemann and the accomplished performances of Fonda and Redgrave. This indicated contrasting aesthetical concerns on a cursory level, yet in the context of Fonda's overtures to 'everyday' Americans suggested her new persona had found favour with the nation's 'grassroots' media.

⁴⁷ Fonda recounts this period in her autobiography as a time when she 'wanted to make films that were stylistically mainstream, films that Middle America could relate to'. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, pp. 359-361.

Julia premiered in New York on 2 October 1977. With protracted press coverage, the film was highly anticipated and highbrow critics duly adopted a hard-line approach. New York critics particularly, familiar with Hellman's life and works, exhibited suspicion of the contemporaneous vogue for her liberal 'heroism'. Vincent Canby's *New York Times* review dismissed *Julia* as 'lifeless' and suggested that its representation of Lillian and Julia's relationship 'tells us both too much and not enough'.⁴⁸ Andrew Sarris in the *Village Voice* rejected renewed interest in the playwright's life, announcing: 'I have never considered it a particular privilege to worship at the shrine of Lillian Hellman.' Not content with denouncing the source material, Sarris reminded readers that Zinnemann had never 'graced my personal pantheon' of *auteur*-class directors.⁴⁹ Objections to *Julia* were not represented solely by Sarris's rather chauvinistic esteem for auteurist cinema, nonetheless. Feminist critic Molly Haskell, who noted the declining representation of women during the early-1970s Hollywood in her monograph *From Reverence to Rape*,⁵⁰ balked at Zinnemann's focus on craft over issues of consequence: 'the dazzling location sequences in *Julia* are a poor substitute for the emotional and political terrain left unexplored.'⁵¹ Haskell also questioned the conception and representation of female politicisation: 'Julia is certainly a more ambiguous woman than the idealized portrait of a Madonna of the Left that Hellman paints and Redgrave incarnates.'⁵² *Julia* thus suffered critical blows from senior commentators in the form of Sarris and Haskell. Even Pauline Kael of the *New Yorker*, not discernibly swayed by auteurism or

⁴⁸ Vincent Canby, 'Julia Tries to Define Friendship', *New York Times* (3 October 1977), p. 39.

⁴⁹ Andrew Sarris, 'Good Intentions Are Not Enough', *Village Voice* (10 October 1977), p. 47.

⁵⁰ Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1973).

⁵¹ Molly Haskell, 'On Not Seeing the Trees for the Forest', *New York* (10 October 1977), p. 61.

⁵² *Ibid.*

feminism, found *Julia* dissatisfying: ‘The script fails to draw you in [...] the constraint and inertness must go back to the decision to treat the story as literary history, as a drama of conscience.’⁵³ A steady observer of Fonda’s stardom, Kael nonetheless recognised the symbolism of Fonda’s Lillian in the throes of political awakening. ‘She creates a driven, embattled woman – a woman over prepared to fight back,’ wrote Kael, acknowledging the political soul that Fonda gave the part within Hellman’s historical tableau.⁵⁴ In this sense the New York critics, at the very least, identified Fonda as *Julia*’s individual ‘heroine’.

The New York critics’ rejection of *Julia* was at odds with its commercial success in both New York and on the east coast, which decisively outperformed the west coast.⁵⁵ Indeed, less prestigious publications in the New York region were attuned to the film’s popularity, with praise contrary to Manhattan’s critical elite. The *New York Daily News* commended the ‘electrifying intensity’ of Fonda’s performance and championed *Julia*’s solid moral undertow.⁵⁶ Across the Hudson in New Jersey, the *Star-Ledger* (the state’s leading paper) applauded the film and Fonda with the headline ‘A Magnificent *Julia* With An Exquisite Jane.’⁵⁷ Judith Crist’s glowing review constituted a mixture of critical favour with a mass readership: Crist was a well respected critic who enthusiastically praised Fonda in the tabloid *New York Post*.⁵⁸ Representing class readerships more mixed than their lofty cousins writing for the *New Yorker* and *New York Times* these journalists embraced Fonda’s dramatic

⁵³ Pauline Kael, ‘A Woman For All Seasons’, *New Yorker* (10 October 1977), p. 94.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Julia* appealed particularly on New York screens, indicating the public were not overly influenced by the critical dismissal of the film. See *Variety* (19 October 1977), p. 1.

⁵⁶ Kathleen Carroll, ‘A Sensitive *Julia* Glows With Warmth’, *New York Daily News* (3 October 1977), p. 23.

⁵⁷ Frances Taylor, ‘A Magnificent With an Exquisite Jane’, *Star-Ledger* (3 October 1977), p. 22.

⁵⁸ Judith Crist, ‘*Julia*: Deep Feeling, Perception’, *New York Post* (3 October 1977), p. 23.

comeback with an enthusiasm appropriate to her mainstream overtures. With the articles written by women, moreover, *Julia* represented a means by which Fonda could interface with ‘everyday’ women she saw as her target audience.

Politically, no clear pattern defined critical responses to *Julia* within America’s periodicals, which is surprising for a film starring two feminist stars and based on the memoirs of political luminary. Whereas a derisive tone from the right-wing *National Review* was unsurprising, the absence of a positive counterweight in the left-leaning *New Republic* muddies any political criteria for analysing the film’s reception. In fact, both periodicals were preoccupied with Fonda’s wider sexual associations and imported these into an overall reproach of her performance. A lukewarm review from the *New Republic*’s Stanley Kauffmann observed that the viewer could tell Fonda was in character as she didn’t look like her ‘knockout self’.⁵⁹ John Simon, writing for *National Review*, deemed Fonda’s pleasing appearance ‘inauthentic’, claiming she was ‘a far too unplain [*sic*] Jane to portray Lillian’.⁶⁰ Fusing these criticisms into a general pining for Fonda’s sexual persona was ironically emblematic of the feminist cause in 1970s America: the star’s pre-radicalised associations were remarkably close at hand.

Fonda’s associations with image change rendered her persona capable of dynamic ‘positive’ development or rehabilitation, yet it also harboured the potential to regress. Kauffmann and Simon’s reviews reflected nostalgia for Fonda’s sex-symbol years, which predated her radical awakening. Indeed, this nostalgia manifested as a commercial venture, with the successful re-release of *Barbarella* eight weeks before

⁵⁹ Stanley Kauffmann, ‘Stanley Kauffmann on Films’, *New Republic* (15 October 1977), p. 32.

⁶⁰ John Simon, ‘Berlin on \$50,000 a Day’, *National Review* (25 November 1977), pp. 1375-1377.

Julia.⁶¹ The dual presence of these films may have seemed incongruent to audiences in one sense but *Barbarella* represented a benign version of Fonda's persona, one that reminded commentators of her once 'compliant' female stardom. With Fonda's political ambitions directed toward the mainstream, her recuperation potentially benefited from the nostalgic strains of her past.

The New York region demonstrated a split in those favouring Fonda's persona, from highbrow critics to less eminent – and crucially less elitist – journalistic figures. This phenomenon replicated in a cluster of sources nationwide. Across the country, publications that would otherwise have spurned Fonda on political grounds radiated approval for her stardom and *Julia*. In Texas, the *Dallas Morning News* highlighted the film's compassionate theme, suggesting this complemented Fonda's political agenda and imbued the character of Lillian with a contemporary relevance: 'Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave are perfectly cast heroines, their own public images merging with their roles on both conscious and unconscious levels.'⁶² Issues of authorship were contemplated in the *Houston Chronicle*, which considered Fonda the most meaningful presence in *Julia*.⁶³ In Illinois, Fonda's rendition of Hellman was likewise considered the anchor of the film by the *Daily Herald*.⁶⁴ America's provincial critics in the Midwest and Deep South thus approved of *Julia*, sometimes explicitly citing its humanitarian ideas. Any observation of nationwide trends must acknowledge, however, the workings of the American press. Certain newspapers lacked a dedicated film critic and procured pundits writing for multiple media outlets. Syndicated reviews by critical luminaries Rex Reed and Gene Siskel appeared in

⁶¹ The films were even ranked together, positions 8 and 9, in the weekly top 10: *Variety* (19 October 1977).

⁶² Philip Wuntch, 'Julia a Symphony of Humanity', *Dallas Morning News* (15 October 1977), p. 30.

⁶³ Jeff Millar, 'Julia is Jane Fonda's Film', *Houston Chronicle* (21 October 1977), p. 7.

⁶⁴ David Sterritt, 'Fonda Portrayal in *Julia* Stirring', *Daily Herald* (21 October 1977), p. 3.

newspapers coast to coast, and Reed's friendship with Zinnemann, in particular, translated to repetitive high praise of *Julia*.⁶⁵ The film, nonetheless, was widely embraced beyond liberal and intellectual circles bearing out its mainstream appeal.

Julia garnered notable 'grassroots' support from both in-house and nationwide reviewers of America's press. This offset the narrative's loftier associations and portrayed *Julia* as a work of noble ambition, with Lillian its moral conscience. Endorsements of this vein appeared in religiously themed publications, responding directly to *Julia*'s humanist storyline. The *Christian Science Monitor* appreciated the film's emotional pull and its worthy portrait of fighting Fascism, Fonda's performance being the pivot for both aspects.⁶⁶ Praise for the prudent representation of women's issues appeared in *Christian Century*: '*Julia*'s understated feminism, politics and literary history account for much of its charm [...] this amalgam of genres keeps it interesting and avoids pomposity, preaching or pedantry.'⁶⁷ Favourable critical reaction from publications representing mainstream America indicated Fonda's persona had been re-embraced to a significant degree. Harboursing political associations under the guise of an anti-fascist piece, *Julia* reminded Americans of liberals' patriotic instincts, which even exuded a moralised religiosity for some observers.

The 1970s was a volatile period for exploring issues of patriotism and heroism. In the wake of its bicentennial, America sought public figures that could

⁶⁵ Rex Reed, 'A Director For All Seasons', *New York Daily News* (9 October 1977), p. 3; Reed, 'At Last, a Movie Like They Used to Make', *Seattle Post-Intelligence* (9 October 1977), p. G5; Reed, '*Julia*: the Masterpiece We've All Been Waiting For', *Rocky Mountain News* (9 October 1977), pp. 17, 22.

⁶⁶ David Sterritt, '*Julia*: Story of Friendship and Antifascist Bravery', *Christian Science Monitor* (5 October 1977), p. 22.

⁶⁷ Peter Lutze, '*Julia* and Lilly', *Christian Century* (21 December 1977), p. 1199.

provide consensus rather than conflict and an element of media coverage during *Julia*'s release realigned Fonda with patriotic values as evidence of her 'recuperation' from her radical activism. This process served both star and nation, whereby Vietnam and the domestic divisions it created were figuratively healed through Fonda's return to mainstream filmmaking. Nationwide publications exhibited recurring motifs; among them the shift in American political attitudes, Fonda's moderated approach to politics (especially in comparison to Redgrave), and her years of 'exclusion' under the Nixon presidency.

In most public, 'epic' instances of reconciliation, discernible ground is conceded by both parties and this applied to Fonda's contemporaneous representation in the press. The key issue remained 'exorcising' her radicalisation during the Vietnam War years, a process employing contemplative mechanisms that deciphered and distanced this notorious episode. On the one hand, Fonda suggested in an interview for *Literary Cavalcade* that her political awakening had been symptomatic of her guilt over being born 'lucky and ignorant': 'At 30 I was still a kid – just finding out what people knew in their teens. I'm still trying to catch up. I still need to read and learn. I have complexes about my lack of political sophistication.'⁶⁸

Personalising political processes suggested her radicalisation was an aberrant, neurotic saga, terms in which she had been portrayed and objected to in other publications.⁶⁹ It also represented an apologia to learned observers wary of her previously 'confrontational' political style. Fonda's image change was not rendered as

⁶⁸ Margaret Ronan, 'An Interview with Jane Fonda on Her New Film *Julia*', *Literary Cavalcade* (October 1977), p. 4.

⁶⁹ Fonda claimed the American media of the early-1970s represented her as a 'raving madwoman'. See Mary Rourke, 'Jane Fonda Won't Give up on Movies', *Press* (5 October 1977), p. 17.

purely individual, nevertheless, as articles charting her reconciliation with Hollywood asserted its wider significance. The *Philadelphia Daily News* rendered Fonda as an American icon from her career's inception in 1960, not least because she was Henry Fonda's daughter. Observing a continuity of 'openness' in her cinematic and public image, the article suggested Fonda's volatile shifts in identity exhibited national dimensions:

She's the girl-next-door who dared to get up and move out and chase life. [...] Throughout all of this Jane never lost her audience's sympathy because she never lost her vulnerability. True, on and off screen, her feistiness, assertiveness and gradual toughening have intimidated and annoyed many of us, but I think we've all understood it. And, possibly, even admired it. She's very much a child of our times.⁷⁰

Fonda's transition from industry excluded radical of the early-1970s to Hollywood's in-house political agitator of 1977 thus rested on a process of recognition: understanding how she became an activist was to acknowledge the climate within which she became politicised.

American media praising Fonda's portrayal of Hellman represented an implicit reconciliation of the Old and New Left, rendering her return to Hollywood films in therapeutic primary colours. The fiscal demands of working within the form of commercial features further suggested an ideological tempering of this once radical

⁷⁰ Joe Baltake, 'Jane Fonda: Finished Woman', *Philadelphia Daily News* (14 October 1977), p. 45.

star. Evidence of this phenomenon manifested in journalism juxtaposing Fonda with her steadfastly radical co-star.

Vanessa Redgrave and the significance of co-stars

Fonda and Redgrave's on and off-screen relationship generated media coverage contemplating their similarities and also the extent and implications of their differences. This raises the issue of how co-stars impact on each other's representation and specifically how Redgrave's contemporaneous radical activism made Fonda's overtures to the American mainstream appear tame by comparison.

Fonda had been linked to Redgrave for a substantial period preceding *Julia's* production. In 1971, *Life* magazine's John Froom dismissed Fonda's interest in radical politics as a copycat strategy, asserting 'I suspect that Jane Fonda really wants to be Vanessa Redgrave'.⁷¹ This rejection of Fonda's individual, intuitive political commitment contextualises later comparisons of the actresses within and without the realm of *Julia*. Indeed, commentators' admiration of the Fonda/Redgrave onscreen dynamics alluded to a mentoring persuasion, enlarging the influence Julia holds over Lillian in the narrative. The actresses' performance styles were seen to underline this: 'Redgrave with her steely passion, Fonda with her tremulous self-doubt and involuntary commitment.'⁷² Yet it was the film's total apparatus that ultimately facilitated any significant comparisons between these stars as it structured their characters as a leader and follower. Some of the flashback sequences, for example,

⁷¹ John Froom, 'Nag, Nag, Nag! Jane Fonda Has Become a Nonstop Activist', *Life* (23 April 1971), p. 52D.

⁷² Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., 'The Duplicitous Art', *Saturday Review* (29 October 1977), p. 48.

featured child actors that worked through the notion of Julia as a visionary adolescent; young Lillian (Susan Jones) asks young Julia (Lisa Pelikan) prosaic questions about her overseas travels ('What about Paris, what about Rome?') whereas Julia has returned to America questioning why abject poverty in Cairo can be tolerated by her grandparents who told her it would be a beautiful place. Similarly, in a flashback featuring Redgrave and Fonda playing Julia and Lillian as young women exploring Oxford, where Julia is studying 'Marx, Engels, Einstein,' during the 1920s, Julia dazzles Lillian with her enthusiasm for Viennese socialism ('I didn't really understand', admits Lillian in voiceover). Julia and Lillian are thus depicted from girlhood to womanhood following different paths in relation to political consciousness; *Julia*, by extension, coded ideological differences between Fonda's and Redgrave's political identities.

Exemplifying the disparities between Lillian's liberal intellectualism and Julia's socialist activism was achieved using a number of cinematic strategies and techniques. The use of child actors in this context is notable, given that their representation proposes both manifest and interpretative differences between Redgrave and Fonda as both characters and stars. These sequences denote Lillian possessed a smaller physical frame than Julia throughout her childhood and adulthood, for example; as adults Fonda and Redgrave do differ in stature and this implies the construction of identity through physicality – at points, Lillian must take two steps to keep apace with just one of Julia's confident strides. Intellectually, physically, and politically, therefore, Lillian is presented as the more 'slight' figure in awe of Julia; Lillian's pivotal act of reluctant heroism serves the anti-fascist cause but she remains a bystander rather than sharing the radical impulses that drive Julia's

activism. This schema reaches its climax in the Berlin café scene of the film, which is the last sequence featuring Fonda and Redgrave. The café setting, despite its simplicity, subtly echoes and comments on an earlier scene depicting Lillian's standing ovation at Sardi's restaurant after her play, *The Children's Hour*, opens on Broadway. In New York Lillian is celebrated as a creative force by its glittering literati; in Berlin, Julia is Lillian's only 'audience' yet hers is the approval she ultimately seeks. When Julia tells Lillian 'I like your anger, don't let anyone talk you out of it,' the film suggests Lillian's political conscience is an outgrowth of Julia's radical legacy.

The casting of Fonda and Redgrave represented a major cornerstone of *Julia*; indeed, Hellman's original championing of Redgrave was echoed by Molly Haskell praising the selection of two strong-willed stars in her otherwise downbeat review:

Here we have two of the most electrifying women in movies in a casting coup that is not only iconographically [*sic*] but politically inspired: Redgrave as Julia, the total activist and martyr to Fascism; Fonda as the acolyte, the rebellious but self-doubting playwright Lillian.⁷³

In essence, *Julia* was publicised and marketed through its stars, identifying the powerful screen presences of Fonda and Redgrave. Haskell's review, however, highlighted the lack of screen time that the two actresses had together. True enough, the smattering of scenes featuring Fonda and Redgrave was potentially dissatisfying

⁷³ Haskell, 'Seeing the Trees For the Forest', p. 61.

in a film pitched as a tale of female friendship, but this absence refracted attention onto the stars' wider personae, especially with regard to their political agendas.

A significant portion of media copy generated by *Julia* enhanced the wider acceptance of Fonda's reformed image through comparative coverage that shifted emphasis onto the American star's liberal – rather than radical – associations.⁷⁴ Redgrave functioned as the 'radical outsider' through the intensity of her politics and, crucially, her British/foreign-ness in comparison to Fonda's American 'home-grown' activism. Fonda played a key role in this process, an example being her following quotes in *Julia*'s pressbook. While reverent toward her co-star, Fonda managed to transfer 'radical focus' onto Redgrave by emphasising the British actress's inclination toward almost saintly political ardour:

It's been very moving to play scenes with someone like Vanessa Redgrave and to see her face radiant because of ideas, because of awakening consciousness about the movement of people who have been disenfranchised and who are taking power. It's nice to see a woman moved by that and be able to remind the audience that we are transported by social processes.⁷⁵

Discussing her own political evolution in the pressbook Fonda reiterated the transitional state of women's roles in Hollywood, being sure to exemplify this via her own career path. This approach represented an attempt to embed and thus camouflage her politicisation within the wider social gains of American women:

⁷⁴ See, for example, Jeanne Miller, 'Vanessa and Jane Wouldn't Talk Politics', *San Francisco Examiner* (18 October 1977), p. 21.

⁷⁵ Jane Fonda quoted in 'Pressbook', *Julia* microfiche, AMPAS.

I think because during the last few years with the growth of the women's movement in the United States and the new consciousness that is inherent in the movement, the old stereotypes for women have been destroyed. [...] The silly ingénues, the Barbarellas, the kind of fluffy-headed silliness that we always took for granted in female roles on the screen. You can't get away with that anymore.⁷⁶

Orbiting Redgrave's star persona intimately in narrative form deemed Fonda's image more 'ordinary' than her counterpart's heroic martyrdom. The Fonda/Redgrave character/star relationship highlights the Fonda's recuperating political identity by depicting Redgrave's ongoing activism as an extreme example of radical commitment. Differing representations of Julia and Lillian thus reflected the contrasts between the actresses and their political personae. Julia's commitment to changing the social order is offset by Lillian's capricious involvement, a spectacle of perceived moral duty rather than innate instinct. *Newsweek* journalist Jack Kroll eagerly asserted such contrasts, noting Fonda was 'totally at odds politically with the Trotskyite Redgrave'.⁷⁷ Indeed, Kroll explained the conventional direction in which Fonda was supposedly heading using an intriguing combination of factors: she was, after all, Henry Fonda's daughter yet was also reaching a 'new maturity' (Fonda turned 40 in 1977). His most pressing concern was to headline Fonda's native advantage over Redgrave:

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kroll, 'Hollywood's New Heroines', p. 45.

Despite her sometimes strident radicalising that angered many Americans in a divided time, she's an image in the American grain – direct, clear, appealing, with the resilience of the old American optimism, good faith and high spirits in her movements and her voice.⁷⁸

By positioning Fonda's activism as an American virtue and privilege, Kroll severed the political ties binding the Fonda and Redgrave star images. Differences between Fonda and Redgrave were also highlighted within the industry, the Academy Awards being a case in point. At the 1976 ceremony, Fonda had led a standing ovation to Hellman that befitted her reconciliatory overtures toward the industry. Two years and eleven Academy Award nominations later, *Julia* became embroiled in controversy at the 1978 ceremony when, during her acceptance speech for Best Supporting Actress, Redgrave 'praised' Academy members for not bowing to a 'bunch of Zionist hoodlums' who had protested her nomination.⁷⁹ In subsequent years, separate disputes witnessed a gesture of loyalty from the Hollywood industry towards Fonda, likening US government treatment of her to McCarthyist style blacklisting, whilst Redgrave was shunned by the establishment.⁸⁰ Radicalism had a new idol.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁹ The 'Zionist hoodlums' to which Redgrave referred were members of the Jewish Defense League protesting Redgrave's nomination because of her film *The Palestinian* (1977), which openly criticised Israel.

⁸⁰ Robert Lindsey, 'Political Views of 2 Actresses Divide Industry', *New York Times* (16 August 1979), p. 24. Fonda's rejection from the California State Arts Council garnered sympathy. The decision to cast Redgrave as a Nazi death camp survivor, however, was met with outrage because of her pro-Palestinian sympathies.

Conclusion

Fonda's return to Hollywood overlapped with Twentieth Century Fox's attempts to procure female audiences, in more ways than is at first discernible. Although Fonda frequently called for shifts in female representation via the media, she typically tempered such demands by deferring to the commercial achievement of 'women's cinema' as the overriding criterion for 'success'. Utilising *Julia*'s pressbook once again, Fonda asserted:

When these films make money and become commercially successful, when it is realized that you can speak through films to a new reality that really touches the lives of women and still be successful then you will begin to find more and more substantial and important roles for women.⁸¹

Emphasising the mainstream success of women's cinema re-associated Fonda with Hollywood's configuration of stardom as commercial production and consumption. Fonda's approach to political cinema also differed fundamentally from Redgrave's, who claimed in *Julia*'s early coverage 'it makes nonsense of both to mix movies with politics'.⁸² Ironically, Redgrave's terseness actually complied with Zinnemann's censoring of political rhetoric, whereas Fonda emerged as the more 'redeemable' figure for Hollywood's capitalist structure insofar as she sought a fusion of commercial and political exploits. The mainstream press deemed this a rather 'American' quality, furthering Fonda's trajectory into the nation's spotlight. Once a

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Klemesrud, 'Vanessa Redgrave', p. D30.

radical, she was now perceived as a patriot – the heir apparent of Hollywood's interest in political cinema.

Chapter Three

Coming Home (1978): Fonda as Auteur

‘There is a point at which Jane Fonda the revolutionary clashes with Jane Fonda the actress. They are not two different people as much as they are two sets of circumstances looking for a medium in which they might both be comfortable.’

Tim Findley, ‘Jane Fonda: The Woman and the War’,
Rolling Stone (25 May 1972) p. 44.

‘I think all of us are trying to figure out – what is a progressive movie, what is a revolutionary movie? Is it really possible to make a movie that is a weapon for political change? I don’t know. I honest-to-God don’t know.’

Jane Fonda quoted in Dan Georgakas, ‘I Prefer Films
that Strengthen People: An Interview with Jane Fonda’,
Cinéaste (Summer 1975), p. 5

‘She’s never gonna play anything but Jane Fonda in a film. I’m convinced that’s all she is now. She’s a more important character than any character she’ll ever play.’

Tom Hayden quoted in Donald Katz, ‘The Renaissance
of Jane Fonda’, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*
(12 March 1978), p. E5.

Introduction

Hollywood films about Vietnam constitute part of America's ongoing attempt to comprehend the war's historical impact and pervasive legacy.¹ The first wave of features to directly address the conflict, released during the late-1970s, represented Vietnam using a number of themes, including its significance for the nation's home front.² *Coming Home* formed part of this phenomenon and occupies an exceptional place in Vietnam's cinematic canon because it starred Jane Fonda, whose high-profile anti-war activism during the early-1970s had made her as a contentious and divisive symbol of the war itself. Released as the first feature of IPC Films, *Coming Home* also proved commercially successful, suggesting audiences were undaunted by the Fonda-Vietnam connection, albeit in fictitious form.³ As film historian Michael Anderegg has noted, '*Coming Home* functions both as a courageous reminder, and as an opportunistic reinterpretation, of Fonda's notorious journey to Hanoi in the summer of 1972.'⁴ It is this oscillation of Fonda's image, between direct involvement in the reality of Vietnam and subsequently forming part of its fictional representation in Hollywood, which highlights key theoretical and historical issues. In short, *Coming Home* functioned within Fonda's career as a redemptive star-vehicle over which she wielded significant control.

¹ This has been an enduring debate for film scholars. Examples include Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Apocalypse Now* (New York: Proteus, 1981); Linda Dittmar and Gene Michuad (eds.), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Mark Taylor, *The Vietnam War in History, Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

² For example, *Who'll Stop the Rain?* (1978) deals with veterans smuggling drugs into the U.S. and *The Deer Hunter* (1978) charts the war's impact on a small band of steel mill workers from Pennsylvania.

³ *Coming Home* secured \$13.5 million in domestic film rentals, making it United Artists' third most successful film of 1978 and within the top twenty of the nation overall. Source: Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. 502.

⁴ Anderegg, 'Hollywood and Vietnam', p. 22.

This chapter considers the extent to which Fonda constituted the principal creative and industrial force of *Coming Home*, or was its *auteur*, as part of her overall return to popular appeal. Fonda's behind-the-scenes power is explored using the film's unpublished production files, highlighting her influence over such matters as script, character, and costume, and how this manifested cinematically.⁵ The widely perceived incongruity between Fonda's established sexual appeal and her emerging politics during the early-1970s constituted an impasse that *Coming Home* retrospectively addressed in 1978. By projecting these elements to varying degrees onto the principal characters of *Coming Home*, the film presented sexuality and politicisation as symptoms of shared ideological enlightenment, a mechanism aggrandised by the filmmakers' claims in interviews that the film attempted 'to re-define what manhood and patriotism meant'.⁶ How Fonda conceived of and contributed to the film's themes of politicisation and/or sexuality is thus of central concern, acknowledging the corresponding prominence of each component in her star image. Fonda's apparent 'transformation' from a benign sex symbol in the 1960s to an ardent radical in the 1970s was denoted in the media by such factors as demeanour, appearance, and outspokenness; contemporaneous photojournalism of Fonda in the mainstream press (including primary sources revealing Fonda's direct pursuit of popular appeal through publicity) is therefore analysed as a major feature of her comeback in two separate but corresponding sections. Widely read magazines carrying cover photos of Fonda are surveyed from mid-1977 until the period of *Coming Home*'s release, treating this as a watershed moment. This chapter aims to

⁵ This approach is informed principally by Patrick McGilligan's study of James Cagney, in which he states 'actors who not only influence artistic decisions (casting, writing, directing, etc.) but demand certain limitations on the basis of their screen personas, may justly be regarded as *auteurs*'. Patrick McGilligan, *Cagney: The Actor as Auteur* (London: A.S. Barnes, 1975), p. 199.

⁶ Bruce Gilbert, co-founder of IPC Films, quoted in Kirk Honeycutt, 'The Five-Year Struggle to Make *Coming Home*', *New York Times* (19 February 1978), p. D13.

reveal segues between Fonda's radical and subsequent reformist/recuperative personae by considering the 'inner' (film development and production) and 'outer' (publicity and consumption) apparatus of Fonda's authorship of *Coming Home*, and their means of mutual reinforcement. On the one hand this challenges simplistic notions of Fonda's 'image change' as a mere symptom of the zeitgeist but also specifically attempts to elucidate the modes through which Vietnam was propitiously repositioned within her star image.

Looking back on *Coming Home*

Set principally in Southern California in 1968, around the time of the Tet Offensive, *Coming Home* features three central characters. Bob Hyde (Bruce Dern) is a fiercely patriotic Marine captain who goes to fight in Vietnam, leaving behind his prim and conventional wife Sally (Fonda). Feeling directionless without Bob, Sally volunteers at the local Veterans hospital. One of the patients is Luke Martin (Jon Voight), a paraplegic Vietnam veteran suffused with anger at his condition. Sally's volunteering precipitates a chance reunion; the back story of the film indicates Sally and Luke went to high school together, where Luke was captain of the football team and Sally was a cheerleader. Over the course of the narrative, Luke's bitterness and Sally's naïveté about the war mutually develop into a shared, politicised enlightenment, the pinnacle of which is accompanied by a love scene between the two characters. Sally's transformed mindset is also gradually represented by her change in hair and costume, which comes to resemble that of her new friend Vi, whom Sally meets on the first night Bob leaves for Vietnam. This codes Sally's development as a form of feminist awakening, given that Vi is represented as a free spirit from the outset of the film.

After a brief interlude in Hong Kong, where Bob and Sally rendezvous for his apportioned rest and recreation, Bob later returns to America from Vietnam a decorated but psychologically damaged veteran. He is informed of Sally's affair by FBI operatives, who have been monitoring Luke since he chained himself to the gates of an army base; with this political action, Luke intended to highlight the suicide of his veteran buddy, Billy (also Vi's little brother), and make a general protest against Vietnam. Sally tells Luke that she wishes to stay married to Bob and they terminate their affair; Bob, meanwhile, is unable to cope with either life after Vietnam, exacerbated by Sally's infidelity and emancipation as a 'conscious' woman. Bob confronts Sally and Luke with an army rifle before he subsequently drowns himself off the coast at the close of the film. Meanwhile, cross-cut with Bob's suicide, Luke gives an impassioned speech to high school kids warning about the horrors of war; the final shot of the film is Sally and Vi entering a supermarket called 'Lucky', unaware of Bob's impending demise.

Coming Home adopted distinctive visual and sonic approaches to representing the home front in 1968, the film's temporal and political setting. Cinematographer Haskell Wexler used filters to soften the daylight, endowing the California milieu with an oneiric quality; indeed, the theme of awakening – be that political or sexual – is mirrored heavily in the narrative of the film. Director Hal Ashby's choice to use contemporaneous pop music attracted some criticism, however, with Vincent Canby bemoaning this device in his *New York Times* review: 'The soundtrack is a nonstop collection of yesterday's song hits (Beatles, Rolling Stones and so on), not one of which is allowed to pass without making some drearily obvious or ironic comment on the action on the screen. Mr. Ashby has poured music over the movie like a child with

a fondness for maple syrup on his pancakes.’⁷ In his defence, Ashby argued that ‘music played a very important part during this period’, the desired effect being to connote a radio broadcasting these anthems throughout the movie, thus acting as a musical tapestry.⁸ Common to the visual and sonic devices of *Coming Home* was a delicate balance between merely trading on nostalgia for the past versus a strategy of resurrecting the ostensibly ‘lost’ impulses of the sixties in order to inspire a fresh perspective on American during the late-1970s. Much of this tension can be discerned through Fonda’s involvement in the project given that she, like the nation at large, endured and exhibited enormous changes as a result of the Vietnam War.

This chapter approaches *Coming Home*, and the contexts of its conception and release, using an auteurist methodology. The film has received an above average amount of scholarly attention, although typically this has been associated with feminist perspectives. In his book surveying 1970s Hollywood cinema, Peter Lev observes in *Coming Home* ‘the nervous rhythms and rebellious spirit of the late-1960s’, as part of his larger chapter on feminist cinema.⁹ Similarly, Tessa Perkins is concerned with the film’s feminist dimensions and groups it together with Fonda’s other films of the 1970s. What they share, Perkins argues, is a character template that ‘usually changes and moves closer to the Jane Fonda star-image of an enlightened, independent, radical woman’, though which falls short of contemporaneous feminist ideals.¹⁰ Barbara Seidman’s assessment of *Coming Home* goes further in its criticism, suggesting it reneges on its feminist credentials as a ‘woman’s film’: ‘although Sally

⁷ Vincent Canby, ‘Film: Post-Vietnam Romantic Triangle’ *New York Times* (16 February 1978), p. C20.

⁸ Honeycutt, ‘Five-Year Struggle’, p. D35.

⁹ Peter Lev, *American Films of the 70s: Conflicting Visions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 157. Also pp. 156-164.

¹⁰ Perkins, ‘The Politics of “Jane Fonda”’, p. 247.

provides the connective tissue holding the story together, her voice can never really compete with the greater melodramatic weight of the men's circumstances.'¹¹ Indeed, Seidman cites the acrimonious split between Fonda and Nancy Dowd¹² (the film's first screenwriter) as severing 'what remained of Fonda's connection with her feminist comrades from the early part of the [1970s]. By sparing Sally the radical personal choices Fonda herself had faced in becoming politically aware, Fonda unquestionably sold out her own knowledge of the painful complexities and inner struggles involved in such growth.'¹³ Much of Seidman's analysis is concerned with the feminist shortcomings of *Coming Home*, what the film 'is not'. However, by alluding to Fonda's 'betrayal' of her feminist principles Seidman inadvertently flags up the level of control, or authorship, that she ultimately had in this process, regardless of its net effect in terms of progressive feminist representation. The purpose of this chapter is not to intervene in this feminist debate, although feminism was undeniably one of the film's main themes; rather, *Coming Home* is analysed as a multi-purpose, recuperative star vehicle for Fonda, offering a cluster of 'elegiac' anti-war rhetoric and ideological compromises that befitted the 'maturing' face of her political activism.

In furnishing an analysis, this chapter utilises the most recent and longstanding research on Fonda and *Coming Home* by scholars Peter Krämer and Richard Dyer respectively. Dyer's analysis of Fonda's star image, forming part of his theoretical model of stardom, highlights the semiotic meaning bound into visual primary sources featuring Fonda.¹⁴ On the general issue of stars and authorship, Dyer remains

¹¹ Barbara Seidman, 'The Lady Doth Protest Too Much, Methinks', in Janet Todd (ed.), *Women and Film* (London: Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 215.

¹² Dowd had been a writer member of Fonda's FTA anti-war theatre troupe and also formed part of served as an unofficial 'feminist consultant' to Fonda on the set of *A Doll's House*.

¹³ Seidman, 'The Lady Doth Protest', p. 216.

¹⁴ Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 72-98.

reluctant to accept wholesale the concept of the star as *auteur*, citing compromising issues such as dominant ideology.¹⁵ Fonda's star authorship, however, was hallmarked by ideological engagement within and without the filmic text, because of her active pursuit of 'commercial-political' cinema during the period under scrutiny. Krämer has investigated the protracted development process of *Coming Home* (which commenced in the early-1970s) from this perspective. He asserts that the film 'can be understood as a logical extension of [Fonda's] anti-war activism, and also as an intervention into what she perceived to be Hollywood's neglect or misleading representation of the Vietnam War, its veterans and the anti-war movement'.¹⁶ The manner in which Fonda's media persona courted mass appeal, however, must be also be considered. Unravelling the extent to which commercial-political cinema aided recuperation of Fonda's star image necessitates, therefore, a holistic view of the industrial, cultural and representational factors influencing the contemporaneous presence of both film and star. This chapter will thus combine the methods employed by Krämer and Dyer, in recognition of their differing but mutually reinforcing attributes.

Recuperating 'Hanoi Jane' in the mainstream press

Fonda's visit to North Vietnam constituted the most contentious episode of her anti-war activism and became one of the defining moments of the era. The American press has also functioned over time as an arbitrator for the public's perceived legitimacy of Fonda's activism. In her 2005 autobiography, Fonda recounted the published 'Hanoi Jane' photographs of her 1972 visit to North Vietnam in markedly conciliatory tones:

¹⁵ Dyer's discussion of Greta Garbo's authorship concludes 'the author of Garbo is ideology'. Ibid., pp. 175-176.

¹⁶ Krämer, 'When "Hanoi Jane" Conquered Hollywood', p. 110.

I realize it is not just a U.S. citizen laughing and clapping on a Vietnamese antiaircraft gun: I am Henry Fonda's privileged daughter who appears to be thumbing my nose at the country that has provided me these privileges. More than that, I am a woman, which makes my sitting there even more of a betrayal. A gender betrayal. *And* I am a woman who is seen as Barbarella, a character existing on some subliminal level as an embodiment of men's fantasies; Barbarella has become their enemy [original emphasis].¹⁷

Aside from apologising yet again for an event occurring over thirty years ago,¹⁸ Fonda's description is striking in that it creates a 'hierarchy' of factors contextualising the subsequent (and enduring) backlash against her in relation to Vietnam.¹⁹ Social privilege (being Henry's daughter) is inflamed by gender, which is in turn inflamed by the lingering – and apparently incompatible – perception of her as a sex symbol. The last of these factors, depicted as the most incongruent with her anti-war activism, couches Fonda's allusion that any departure from 'being Barbarella' was deeply unpopular, principally with heterosexual men. Having once posed as 'Miss Army Recruitment for 1962',²⁰ starred as Barbarella in 1968, and embraced radical causes shortly thereafter, Fonda had plotted a spectrum of feminine identities, from the silent compliance of a pin-up to the vocal dissent of a front-line feminist and anti-war activist. This political trajectory necessitated Fonda publicly rejecting her 'passive' *Barbarella* persona, yet the fractured *visual* 'transformation' into a radical was

¹⁷ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 318.

¹⁸ Fonda made her first public apology in a television interview with Barbara Walters in 1988.

¹⁹ For a detailed study of how Fonda's Vietnam associations have been negatively embellished at certain points in history, see Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, pp. 109-189.

²⁰ Herman and Downing, *All American Anti-Heroine*, p. 32.

persistently measured by the American press in comparison to, and thus relative to, her image as a sex symbol.²¹

A large part of Fonda's popular resurgence after Vietnam was facilitated by tempering her activist persona through the American media. In particular, Fonda's return to Hollywood in 1977 was embraced by mainstream publications as part of an overall maturation process, the onus being to portray her lifestyle as that of a reformed radical: 'Fonda has it both ways: she can beat up on the Establishment and join it, too,' wrote Lois Armstrong in the widely read *People* magazine.²² *Newsweek*'s Jack Kroll observed Fonda's new 'approachability': 'the contradictions – personal, political and professional – that once gave her life an almost schizoid split have been resolved, thanks in great part to her marriage to the '60s radical Tom Hayden'.²³ Interestingly, Kroll's sentiments are echoed somewhat in Dyer's closing statements on Fonda's star image; Fonda's charisma, Dyer argues, 'can be accounted for [...] in the reconciliation of radicalism and feminism with Americanness and ordinariness'.²⁴ Although Dyer stops short of terming her the *auteur* of this resolution, Fonda's own intervention in this media process cannot be understated, especially in relation to the burgeoning women's press of the period.²⁵ The American press had proved a conduit for public anger against Fonda during the early-1970s, yet equally proved a tonic for public acceptance upon her Hollywood return in 1977.

²¹ For an analysis of the change in *written* reporting styles on Fonda, see McLeland, 'Barbarella Goes Radical', pp. 232-252.

²² Lois Armstrong, 'Jane Still Has Her Causes but She's at Home in Hollywood Again' *People* (16 May 1977), p. 88.

²³ Kroll, 'Hollywood's New Heroines', *Newsweek* (10 October 1977), p. 81.

²⁴ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 98.

²⁵ Fonda appeared on the covers of the women's monthly and/or weekly magazines *Ms.* (October 1977), *Us* (1 November 1977), and *McCall's* (January 1978), thus bracketing a range of feminine ideologies from the liberal, independent woman (*Ms.*) to the docile wife and mother (*Us*). She also appeared on covers of the mass circulated weeklies *People* (16 May 1977) and *Newsweek* (10 October 1977).

Fonda's repositioning represented cordiality for all concerned. She actively demonstrated a willingness to adapt herself for maximum appeal, whilst magazines carrying her image on their cover resituated this wayward actress in the realm of fame rather than infamy. This likely proved a favourable strategy in augmenting a positive swing in Fonda's popularity since it did not rely solely on people going to see her films. Her image was therefore present not just on the cinema screen but also, crucially, on the street level of the newsstand, offering a more pedestrian mode of engagement. Recounting the publicity blitz surrounding her return to dramatic art in *Julia*, *Rolling Stone* journalist Donald Katz pointed out in 1978 that Fonda's media presence had become imbued with a curiously mundane 'middle-class "woman on the move" image which had never really fit [her] before'.²⁶ In candidly admitting this was a conciliatory gesture towards the American public, Fonda also highlighted its strategic dimensions:

I did them all [...] *McCall's*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Family Circle*. Those magazines represent mainstream America and are read by people that used to be scared of me and thought me unpatriotic. I want them to like me. I know I'm viewed as a symbol of 'the Movement,' as someone to these people's left, thus if I can be accepted by them I think my ideas will become more acceptable.²⁷

Missing from Fonda's statement above is an explicit acknowledgement that the magazines mentioned were aimed at and read by women. Her reference to being

²⁶ Donald Katz, 'Jane Fonda: A Hard Act to Follow', *Rolling Stone* (9 March 1978), p. 43.

²⁷ Ibid.

‘accepted’ denoted Fonda’s willingness to make political compromises for these largely female readerships, treating their approval as a benchmark for infiltrating the mainstream. This strategy was also inflected with an emboldened feminist slant if necessary, tailored to more ‘enlightened’ women, suggesting that Fonda’s scattershot approach to furnishing a political image in the media had become more pragmatic than ideological. Keen to maintain alignment with the new feminist consciousness, Fonda persisted in vocally distancing herself from her *Barbarella* years, and contemporaneous photojournalism reinforced this with the utmost visual economy.

Fonda’s appearance on the cover of *Ms.* (fig. 5) in October 1977 was perhaps the least compromising of her overtures to the women’s press given the concordant feminist principles of the magazine and her own politics. The image shows Fonda ‘now’ (1977) and an inset picture of Fonda-as-Barbarella ‘then’ (1968). The caption reads: ‘JANE FONDA The Long Trip From...Sex Object...To Woman’. The larger contemporaneous image of Fonda in an authorial pose resembles a novelist’s photograph on a book. This had connotations with her role as playwright and memoirist Lillian Hellman but, moreover, complemented the magazine’s caption in suggesting Fonda was the mature ‘author’ of her own life. Her expression is that of a woman ‘in control’, both because of her imminent embarkation into film production with IPC Films but also because of what she has left behind, symbolised by the miniature *Barbarella*. It is striking to note the use of *Barbarella* as a figure of comparison since she is a *fictional* character. The period of Fonda’s career to which *Barbarella* alluded was thus packaged in a manner seeking to disassociate and jettison her sexual objectification using temporal and compositional elements, making way for



Figure 5. *Ms.* (October 1977).
Fonda as feminist icon.

the ‘real’ Jane Fonda who looms over her. Crucially, however, the journey implied between 1968 and 1977 overlooks the cycle of anti-war activism sandwiched by these two periods, rendering it either an embedded ‘phase’ in this process or perhaps inflammatory territory and therefore to be ignored (it is, nonetheless, discussed explicitly in the article).²⁸

Fonda’s apparent ‘feminist maturity’ presented by the *Ms.* cover is thrown into question, though, in light of more mainstream photojournalism published earlier in 1977. The *People* cover (fig. 6) of May 16, 1977, announced a feature reminiscing

²⁸ Margaret Drabble, ‘Her Own Woman at Last?’, *Ms.* (October 1977), pp. 51-53, 88-89.



Figure 6. *People* (16 May 1977).
Nostalgia and national forgiveness.

about the ‘old’ Jane Fonda (in the context of her comeback) by promoting the memoirs of her first husband, Roger Vadim, the perceived architect of Fonda’s *Barbarella* period. Fonda was thus depicted as the subject of a man’s nostalgia, the years when she was ‘just’ a sexualised actress with no ideas about breaking out of her mould. The photograph plays up to Vadim’s romanticised image of her; far from the *Barbarella* period being dormant, the sexual appeal of Fonda was alive and kicking. Her gaze at the camera, from beneath swathes of roving hair, contrasts with the knowing qualities of the *Ms.* cover; it is brooding and mysterious, a reminder of the sensuality that Fonda exuded in Europe during the 1960s and also a rather clichéd depiction of an ‘enigmatic’/‘unknowable’ star. It works, moreover, to complicate the assurance of the *Ms.* cover by reopening the corridor between ‘sex object’ and

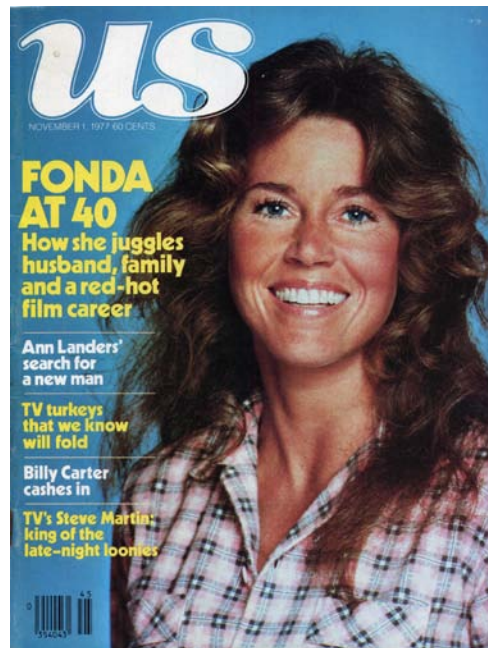


Figure 7. *Us* (November 1977).
Fonda's overture to the mainstream.

'woman' in her star image. Nostalgia for Fonda's pre-radical/*Barbarella* period of 1968 (also the year in which *Coming Home* is set) thus functioned as a seductive extra-textual feature of the film in general, encouraging male interest in a work *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby otherwise deemed 'a woman's picture' upon its release.²⁹

The third cover in the assembled trio illustrates Fonda's most conservative approach in reaching out to audiences not typically in her sphere of influence. It is the most disarming of the three, and the most conventional (she smiles for the camera, shoulders slightly turned). Unsurprisingly, then, the *Us* cover of November 1977 (fig. 7) emphasised Fonda's connection to the everyday ('How she juggles husband,

²⁹ Canby, 'Post-Vietnam Romantic Triangle', p. C20.

family’) and her celebrity status (‘and a red-hot film career’), her reason for being on the cover. Her ‘naturalness’ in the photograph is underlined by expression, simple ‘country girl’ dress, moderately styled and healthy looking hair, and, of course, the mention of family – the intended image is a working woman/wife/mother. Although seemingly the most ‘uncomplicated’ of the three magazine covers presented, it indicates two ambiguous features. Firstly, that Fonda could appear on the cover of the unadventurous magazine *Us* was a measure of how perceptions of her image were reconciling with the traditional female roles of wife and mother, and how those roles themselves were in a state of flux. Secondly, and more specifically, the mix of ordinariness and extraordinariness inherent in Fonda’s new presentation of self foreshadowed the type of roles she would play under the auspices of her production company, IPC. These characters, typically ‘ordinary’ women in ‘extraordinary’ situations that become politicised by their circumstances, functioned as working examples of the charismatic apparatus that Dyer observes, whereby Fonda’s image subsumed the outlandish radicalism of her past within a more identifiably ‘American’ (i.e. the contemporaneous context is ‘liberal progressive’ or ‘reformist’) political identity during the late-1970s.³⁰ This process necessitated revisiting and exorcising Fonda’s years of angry anti-war rhetoric, but through the soothing, cathartic camera lens of the fiction film.

Creative control, part 1: Sally Hyde

Coming Home offered a number of industrial and representational opportunities and Fonda’s documented contributions to the characterisation of Sally Hyde reveal a

³⁰ Dyer’s book was published in 1979, so *Coming Home* was the only IPC film released when he wrote on Fonda’s star image. A second edition of *Stars*, published in 1998 with a supplementary chapter by Paul McDonald, retained exactly the same material on Fonda without revisions.

process more complex than is at first discernible. Peter Krämer's research outlines the considerable influence Fonda had in conceiving both her character and the film itself. Using an unpublished July 1976 story conference for *Coming Home*, he argues: 'a comparison of the script with the finished film reveals that the extensive comments Fonda made during this meeting were not only largely taken on board [...] but also substantially reshaped the film's story, characters and meaning.'³¹ In particular, Sally's definition of herself principally as a sex object shifted, to becoming a satellite of the 'genteel world of officers' clubs and wives' meetings', from which she then embarks on a sexual and political transformation.³² This, in turn, informs Krämer's broader classification of Fonda as 'a feminist objecting to uncritical representations of women as willing participants in a sexist culture'.³³ Krämer's research sketches Fonda's control over the conception of *Coming Home* and makes a notable contribution to issues concerning female authorship and creative power during the New Hollywood period. Fonda's broader agenda, moreover, was inclined toward embedding political issues into cinematic spectacles in order to both mobilise and *appeal to* mainstream America. Scrutiny of Fonda's influence over *Coming Home* must therefore acknowledge that her 'victories' regarding characterisation had a dual function; though progressive in some contexts, Fonda's instinct to embody 'ordinary' characters who reach a moderate level of politicisation was also a calculated concession, reflecting her desire to produce cinema simultaneously challenging and palatable to the mainstream consciousness.

³¹ Krämer, 'When "Hanoi Jane" Conquered Hollywood', p. 112. While this is largely true, Krämer's claim that 'other story conferences and discussions on the set, for which no documentation is available', is erroneous. Story conferences for 7 August 1976 (in which Fonda participated) and 28/29 August 1976 (where Fonda's contributions are discussed) are examples that can be found in the Hal Ashby papers, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [hereafter AMPAS].

³² Ibid., pp. 112-113.

³³ Ibid., p. 113.

As an IPC film, *Coming Home* constituted a cinematic canvas, albeit fictitious, for Fonda to re-imagine her political awakening through a character's narrative journey. The commercial dimensions of this process were telegraphed as early as 1975, when Fonda claimed in the leftist journal *Cinéaste*: 'you're not going to make a mass movie that is revolutionary. [...] I think it's important to do a picture that is going to be seen by a lot of people.'³⁴ Poised to make distinct *political* concessions to conservative branches of the women's press in 1977, an equivalent dilemma remained of how Fonda could refurnish her appeal amongst 'everyday' men, a fan base hitherto garnered in large part through her status as sex symbol. The potential 'reintroduction' of sexuality into Fonda's star image through *Coming Home* after its apparent absence during her activist period raises the issue of whether Fonda had indeed ever made a decisive break with sex appeal. In his survey of her star image, Dyer discusses whether Fonda's 'feminist prostitute' character in *Klute* (1971) – from her radical era – is either shackled by, or breaks free from, the star's earlier associations with sexuality and its sometimes 'crude' construction in the media.³⁵ Dyer also suggests that the same 'problem' potentially arises with Fonda's discussion of fucking (as a patriarchal and thus political act) in Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout Va Bien* (1972) and, significantly, her nude/love scene in *Coming Home*, in which Voight/Luke orally brings Fonda/Sally to orgasm.³⁶ Discussion of *Coming Home* as Fonda's 'Vietnam film' therefore merits focus on how politicisation and sexuality were integrated into the film's broader conception and, in turn, featured in the film as finished product. The following section evaluates Sally's characterisation using the film's unpublished development and production files from the mid-1970s, and considers whether the

³⁴ Georgakas, 'I Prefer Films that Strengthen People', p. 5.

³⁵ Dyer, *Stars*, pp. 81-88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

eventual focus on sexual awakening ‘advantageously’ reduced the character’s political potential for purposes of mainstream palatability.

The character of Sally Hyde metamorphosed across manifold drafts of *Coming Home*. This transformative process was especially fitting given Fonda’s previous string of image changes over the course of her career. The film’s original screenwriter, Nancy Dowd, wrote a mammoth 227-page screenplay entitled *Buffalo Ghost* centred on Marilyn (later Sally), a South Dakota trailer park resident whose husband, Johnny, returns from Vietnam prone to violent outbursts. Although the other veteran character, a paraplegic, does feature heavily, there is no affair, merely an expression of sexual frustration and desire from both parties. The screenplay concludes with Johnny’s accidental death and Marilyn leaving town, driving to anywhere.³⁷ This ambiguous ending, bordering on nihilism, was representative of many ‘New Hollywood’ films of this period, populated by aimless and ‘damaged’ protagonists, of which Fonda’s Bree Daniel in *Klute* is a notable example. The dramaturgy thus provides a comparative arc to chart the respective impact of screenwriter Waldo Salt, and later Fonda, on Sally’s characterisation.³⁸

Salt’s first set of notes on *Buffalo Ghost* in July 1974 suggested Marilyn lacked clear conscious and unconscious drives and proposed widening the perspective to include the male characters more significantly.³⁹ Five months later, Salt’s notes indicated the story’s relocation to California, where the ‘trailer trash’ setting was

³⁷ Nancy Dowd, ‘Buffalo Ghost’ screenplay, box 13, folder 9, Waldo Salt papers, UCLA Arts Special Collections, USA [hereafter WSP/UCLA]. Dowd was replaced by Salt after being asked to make substantial alterations her screenplay. See also Honeycutt, ‘Five-Year Struggle’, p. D13.

³⁸ The exact date of Dowd’s screenplay is unclear but Salt’s first set of notes on *Buffalo Ghost* are dated 25 July 1974.

³⁹ Waldo Salt, ‘Continuity Notes’ (25 July 1974), folder 1, box 14, WSP/UCLA. This greater focus on Bob and especially Luke partly informed Fonda’s intervention in Sally’s characterisation.

subsumed into a 'beach bum' milieu offering Prue and Bob Cather (eventually Sally and Bob Hyde) 'good surf'. Tomboyish and rowdy, Prue is also deeply impressed by 'macho' (represented as violent) behaviour to the point of sexual excitement.⁴⁰ Named Jean, Sandy, and eventually Sally in subsequent sets of notes, Fonda's character as written lives a down-at-heel, counter-cultural existence (she smokes dope, lives in a trailer, and is part of a surfing community); this 'hippy chick' persona was eventually applied to the supporting female character, Vi, in later scripts. By early-1975, Sally had become more defined by 'Christian virtues' in Salt's notes and is described as a 'do-gooder because she thinks it will do her good'.⁴¹ Come April that year, Luke and Sally's symbiotic relationship was in place: he is the catalyst for making her reassess Vietnam, and she, in turn, 'humanises' him.⁴² The primmer Sally Hyde of the film had begun to take shape but remained distinctly working class, which was not the target audience Fonda was attempting to rally.⁴³

In June 1975, Salt employed the working title *Going Home* (named after the Rolling Stones' song) and despite expressing concern over neglecting the male characters of the script, Sally's viewpoint remained preponderant in his outline notes. This focus included scenes of Sally confronting VA hospital doctors over their maltreatment of patients and threatening them with media exposure. In the character's final analysis, Sally chooses to live her own life rather than choose between two men: a lucid feminist statement.⁴⁴ While Fonda remained attached to the role of Sally throughout the development process, no documentation has emerged detailing

⁴⁰ Waldo Salt, 'Continuity Notes' (11 December 1974), folder 1, box 14, WSP/UCLA. This aspect of the character would form the basis of Fonda's attack on Salt's conception of Sally.

⁴¹ Waldo Salt, 'Continuity Notes' (24 March 1975), folder 1, box 14, WSP/UCLA.

⁴² Waldo Salt, 'Continuity Notes' (5 April 1975), folder 1, box 14, WSP/UCLA.

⁴³ See the discussion of Fonda wanting to 'raise the consciousness of the privileged classes' with *Fun with Dick and Jane* in chapter 1.

⁴⁴ Waldo Salt, 'Outline Notes for *Going Home*' (13 June 1975), folder 4, box 14, WSP/UCLA.

Fonda's direct contributions to these particular outline notes; discernible fragments from her activist past, however, were absorbed into the screenplay. For example, as part of Luke's 'political education' of Sally he shows her (while stoned) a set of slides from his tour of duty in Vietnam, mirroring the political slideshow Tom Hayden showed Fonda in her living room during their period of courtship.⁴⁵ Also in these notes, Luke frequents a GI coffeehouse, where a political cabaret reminiscent of Fonda's anti-war troupe, FTA, performs.⁴⁶ Such details, which can be definitively linked to Salt only, indicate his familiarity with the anti-war movement and his possible alignment with Fonda's radical history. Whether Fonda suggested these sequences directly is nevertheless of minor concern at this stage, as it is the script's capacity for biographical allusion that emerges as its crucial feature. A year later in his 1976 first draft (re-titled *Coming Home*), and on the eve of Fonda's documented involvement in the film's story conferences, Salt had written dialogue for Sally's hospital confrontation scene describing her as 'a shrill hysterical woman', the standard media condemnation of Fonda's outspokenness during the Vietnam War.⁴⁷ With Sally eliciting reactions worthy of 'Hanoi Jane', Fonda's subsequent intervention in her characterisation was both timely and a revelation of Sally's strategic importance to the star's mainstream recuperation.

The biographical allusions of Sally's character significantly shifted in emphasis after Fonda attended the story conferences of 29 July and 7 August 1976, along with Bruce Gilbert, Hal Ashby and producer Jerome Hellman. These meetings

⁴⁵ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, pp. 283-286. The slideshow remained in the final film, minus the drug use.

⁴⁶ The acronym FTA stood for both 'Free the Army' and 'Fuck the Army'. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 272.

⁴⁷ Waldo Salt, '*Coming Home* 1st draft screenplay' (11 June 1976), folder 4, box 16, WSP/UCLA.

occurred after the submission of Salt's first draft, with Salt in absentia.⁴⁸ This created a power vacuum in which Salt's conception of Sally was attacked and defended by Fonda and Hellman respectively. Fonda's first criticism of Salt's script during the July conference was to accuse him of basing Sally on a woman named T. Hager, a military man's wife who had been interviewed as part of the film's extensive research process. She challenged him to write 'an original character' although in essence this simply allowed Fonda to apply her own experiences to Sally's ideological 'awakening': 'the problem with Sally, the way she is in the script I think is that you never see where she is moving from. You never see how her one reality in the beginning comes in conflict with a new reality which she then adapts herself to and is a better person for it.'⁴⁹ That Sally became a mouthpiece for Fonda's ideology regarding personal and political growth was unsurprising, and may have occurred without the star's intervention. In the press, Fonda repeatedly credited Hayden in mainstream publications as her mentor in realising cinema's political potential and he, in turn, observed the harmonious shift linking Fonda with her 'recuperating' country: 'I'm very impressed by how rapidly Jane's image has started to reverse itself. It's not just her doing, it's a sign that the country has been changing.'⁵⁰ All of this publicity would amount to associating 'politicised' characters like Sally with the matrix of Fonda and Hayden's CED movement, in addition to the realm of the released film. As a biographical canvas, however, Sally allowed Fonda to explore themes of sexual representation that predated her political awakening.

⁴⁸ Salt suffered a heart attack soon after submitting his first draft, but rejoined the story conferences in late August 1976. Hellman acted as Salt's 'representative' in these conferences and clashed with Fonda as a result: this constituted the main confrontation over plot and character, with Ashby largely agreeing with Fonda.

⁴⁹ Fonda quoted in 'Coming Home Story Conference' transcript (29 July 1976), folder 204, box 23, Hal Ashby papers, AMPAS [hereafter HA/AMPAS].

⁵⁰ Kroll, 'Hollywood's New Heroines', p. 45.

Sally's sexual identity constituted a much discussed topic in the film's development process and later became an emblematic feature of *Coming Home*. Originally written as a woman that responded to Bob's violent outbursts with sexual excitement, Fonda attacked this trait of the character, arguing that Sally should be seen to 'endure' his lovemaking rather than solicit it. This sentiment intersected with the broader 'journey' Fonda had ostensibly made from being a sex object in the 1960s to explicitly questioning the power relations of sex in *Klute*, for example.⁵¹ Indeed, when sparring with Jerome Hellman over this issue, Fonda insisted that her version of the character would be more sympathetic because Fonda had 'lived' the reality, having been married to someone she thought she loved.⁵² Fonda also stressed the need for a distinct contrast in the way Bob and Luke make love to Sally: 'I think that one of the most important things about Luke as opposed to Bob is the fact that Luke is like a woman. Luke doesn't make a move 'til he knows that she is wanting him.'⁵³ Such a detail was later dismissed by the film's first wave of lukewarm reviews, with Pauline Kael asking 'are liberals really such great lovers?'⁵⁴ but Luke and Sally's love scene remained pivotal both within the conferences and the final film. The scene represented a means for Fonda to tackle her long standing associations with sexuality from a 'feminist' perspective yet its inherent ambiguity also reinstated this past persona as an onscreen 'spectacle' of potential appeal, complementing the nostalgia afoot in *Coming Home*. That sexuality constituted her most ingratiating agency was obliquely highlighted by Jon Voight's account of paraplegic extras' responses to Fonda on set:

⁵¹ A scene depicting Sally looking vacant as Bob makes love to her in *Coming Home* dovetails with a shot of Bree in *Klute* checking her wristwatch, as she 'services' a client; both women are mentally 'detached'.

⁵² Fonda was referring to Roger Vadim in all but name, and thus, by extension, to her sex symbol period.

⁵³ Fonda quoted in 'Coming Home Story Conference' transcript (29 July 1976), folder 204, box 23, HA/AMPAS.

⁵⁴ Pauline Kael, 'Mythologizing the Sixties', *New Yorker* (20 February 1978), p. 121.

‘a lot of guys disagreed with her politically, but they sure were attracted to her sexually.’⁵⁵ The impasse of reconciling sex symbolism with political activism could apparently be squared (by men, at least) through privileging the former over the latter.

The eventual focus on Sally’s sexual awakening eclipsed the role’s political potential, and is connoted through the latter component’s virtual absence from *Coming Home*.⁵⁶ Privileging Sally’s sexual awakening at the expense of the character’s activism mirrored the veterans’ on-set engagement with Fonda, yet the Luke/Sally love scene also functioned within an ambiguous representational framework. As a topic, the sexual identities of disabled people had existed in the script from the beginning, with ‘Sally’ and Vi in Dowd’s screenplay watching paraplegic pornographic films in the spirit of understanding. The sexual theme soon became incorporated, though, into the story proper in the form of Sally and Luke’s affair. In publicity accompanying the film’s release, Jerome Hellman described the favourable reactions of the veteran extras in *Coming Home*, who praised the depiction of Luke as a disabled character ‘with a complete repertory of feelings, emotions, visceral and sexual needs’.⁵⁷ Over the course of the script’s development, the dimension of the love story/scene had grown in melodramatic significance and the story conference of August 7, 1976, indicates that Fonda intervened dynamically in the scene’s execution. Firstly, by being brought to orgasm, Fonda was keen to represent Sally as reaching a new ‘reality’ as a woman: ‘I think that after orgasm I think that she crys [sic] and I think that she crys [sic] out of a tremendous release. [...] It’s a release of years of pent up frustration and nervousness [...] it’s crying out of

⁵⁵ Janet Maslin, ‘For Jon Voight, A Coming Home’ *New York Times* (13 February 1978), p. C15.

⁵⁶ Sally’s militancy toward the hospital doctors, for example, where she threatens media exposure, was omitted and seems to have been replaced by a sequence where she confronts the officers’ wives over the triviality of their self-published magazine.

⁵⁷ Jerome Hellman quoted in Honeycutt, ‘Five-Year Struggle’, p. D35.

fear of what does it mean [...] all those kind of things.’⁵⁸ By heightening the dramatic significance of this moment still further, Fonda suggested: ‘I can see her coming out of the crying laughing. And I think that the laughing which is one of her most loveable qualities is always to step outside and look at the irony of the situation she is in and laugh at it and I think that she is laughing because in all her imagination she never thought that it would happen to her this way.’⁵⁹ The psychological and emotional endowment of Sally’s orgasm scene connoted that Fonda felt the need to ‘justify’ her appearance within a spectacle dealing with sexuality yet returns to the dilemma of whether ‘Fonda’ and ‘sex appeal’ had ever, and could ever, exist exclusively.

The significance of Luke and Sally’s love scene is illuminated in the wider context of Fonda’s status as a sex symbol. Having been subjected to (and outlasted) Duran Duran’s deadly ‘pleasure’ contraption in *Barbarella* and faked orgasms for clients in *Klute*, Fonda’s associations with female (and male) pleasure were eclectic indeed, and Sally’s achievement of orgasm seemingly ‘resolved’ this association once and for all. Most certainly the connection occurred to Fonda, who protested in conference: ‘I have been described as someone who has done a lot of naked scenes in movies but that is not true. I have a couple of times under very, very special circumstances. But I don’t want to do it anymore.’⁶⁰ This insistence that she not appear naked in the film (thus denying the spectacle of her body) suggested Fonda’s ‘growth’ after her sex symbol years was paralleled by Sally’s growth into an orgasmic woman. Both processes were deeply problematic nonetheless, as coverage of the

⁵⁸ Fonda quoted in ‘*Coming Home* Story Conference’ transcript (7 August 1976), folder 203, box 23, HA/AMPAS.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

film's release would indicate. On the one hand, accounts of the film's production stressed Fonda's reluctance to appear nude. The *New York Times* discussed this in some detail, noting Fonda was 'fearful audiences would see not the character but Jane Fonda up there naked on the scene'.⁶¹ On the other hand, representing the 'illusion' of Fonda's nudity credibly became a spectatorial imperative for some reviewers. John Simon of the conservative *National Review* bemoaned Fonda's explicit 'absence' from the more corporeal shots: 'if you are going to get a body model for some nude shots of Fonda [...] try not to get one with stubby, plebeian fingers, when Fonda's are long and aristocratic.'⁶² Hal Ashby also highlighted a moral and political dimension to the spectacle of Fonda's nudity: 'the people who say "I always knew that's what Jane Fonda was like" you can do nothing about anyway. I felt good about the scene.'⁶³ The final word must nevertheless go to Pauline Kael of the *New Yorker*, who, on the hunt of a rhetorical scent, dismissed Sally as an ideological artefact: 'Jane Fonda isn't playing a character in *Coming Home*, she's playing an abstraction – a woman being radicalized.'⁶⁴ Sally does experience a 'political' awakening, albeit tempered by an emphasis on sexuality. The more activist elements of Fonda's own history were, however, refracted onto the other characters and the *mise-en-scène* of *Coming Home*, revealing her mainstream trajectory away from the 'singular' radical identity of 'Hanoi Jane'.

⁶¹ Honeycutt, 'Five-Year Struggle', p. D35.

⁶² John Simon, 'Truth – For Beginners', *National Review* (14 April 1978), p. 481.

⁶³ Honeycutt, 'Five-Year Struggle', p. D35.

⁶⁴ Kael, 'Mythologizing the Sixties', p. 119.

Creative control, part 2: *Coming Home*

Fonda's impact on *Coming Home* was acutely represented by Sally's characterisation and onscreen presence but not confined by these parameters. The characters of Luke, Bob and Vi were also subject to Fonda's advices, as were the technical aspects of the film, such as editing, location scouting, and costumes. A loosely common theme linking Fonda's contributions together was her emphasis on 'lived experience' as a means of validating her opinions. Fonda's referrals to her own involvement with America's anti-war movement informed the film's fictitious construction, and thereby imbued *Coming Home* with a hybrid quality, existing somewhere curiously betwixt and between Fonda's Vietnam 'reality' and its cinematic counterpart. This echoes the 'opportunistic' quality of *Coming Home* to which Anderegg refers, and can be discerned in some crucial areas.

Coming Home represented a means to show how 'ordinary' people became politicised by the war, a theme typifying the strategies of IPC Films. Telegraphing Luke and Sally's respective political growth constituted a recurring topic of the July and August story conferences. Fonda's contributions to this process included editing suggestions: 'I want to suggest cutting back and forth from Bob and Sally to Luke. Not just to keep Luke in the story [but] to avoid popping back on to the results – suddenly he's a political spokesman.'⁶⁵ This emphasis on carefully plotting Luke's development alluded to the 'jarring' transformation of Fonda in the American press that had become part of the controversy surrounding her activism. It also demonstrated Fonda's awareness of the cinematic construction of identity, in that

⁶⁵ Fonda quoted in 'Coming Home Story Conference' transcript (7 August 1976), folder 203, box 23, HA/AMPAS.

through editing Sally and Luke are shown to be on parallel paths toward political ‘enlightenment’. Associating Sally and Luke’s development with their circumstances rather than any innate quality complied with the audience based model of IPC Films by suggesting that ‘ordinary’ people could be politicised holistically.

Fonda’s activist history intersected stealthily with the character of Luke in significant ways. Representing the parallel ‘awakening’ of *Coming Home*, Krämer observes that Luke’s characterisation was based on Vietnam veteran and anti-war activist Ron Kovic, who was later immortalised in Oliver Stone’s biopic *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989).⁶⁶ Kovic’s anti-war activism never attained the level of media exposure bestowed on Fonda during the war; it did, however, represent a means of alignment through a common radical calling.⁶⁷ The characterisation of Luke therefore drew from both Fonda’s and Kovic’s anti-war identities during the development and production processes. Luke’s politicisation in *Coming Home* also alluded to Fonda’s anti-war persona in a representational sense, exemplified by scenes depicting the media attention attracted by his singular, ‘heroic’ efforts to protest the war when he chains himself to the gates of an army recruitment centre. If asserting the presence of Fonda’s anti-war history within Luke-as-Kovic seems a step too far, it is nonetheless borne out by both her contributions to the film’s story conferences and subsequently her interviews accompanying its release.

The bedrock of the Fonda-Luke-Kovic dynamic was Fonda’s awareness, and occasional insistence, that Kovic provide the inspiration for Luke’s characterisation,

⁶⁶ Krämer, ‘When “Hanoi Jane” Conquered Hollywood’, p. 110.

⁶⁷ Fonda had shared a platform with Kovic at an anti-war rally in Claremont, CA, in 1973, during which Kovic stated ‘I may have lost my body, but I’ve gained my mind’. Fonda identifies this sentence as the inspiration for *Coming Home* in her autobiography. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 344.

suggesting that Kovic's politicisation be almost recognisable. This meant that if Kovic's story could be 'told', and therefore 'explained' by proxy, Fonda's – albeit in diluted form – could be, too. The earliest example of this occurred in the July story conference when the ambiguity of Luke's character development was discussed: 'that's why I think it's really important to talk to Ron. This is a guy who is a football player, this is a guy who re-enlisted three times, he went over to kill gooks and it wasn't really until he was wounded and on his way back through the maze of hospitals and medics and all of that shit, that he suddenly began to see.'⁶⁸ Fonda's fervour to see Luke's characterisation placed at the altar of Kovic's life story is at first curious given her previous criticism of Waldo Salt basing Sally on the woman named T. Hager. Indeed, Salt's papers reveal that he had previously resisted the simplistic grafting of Kovic's perspective onto Luke's for reasons of it being dramaturgically unsound: 'I think the problem as it shows itself here comes from basing some of the concepts of Luke's character on interviews with people who are looking back – seven years in Ron's case – with considerable self-serving wishful thinking and romantic hindsight.'⁶⁹ Fonda's subsequent comments in the July conference, therefore, elucidate her instincts: 'we have to see the collision between [Sally's] world view and Luke's. However it's done, if it's done with no words, or few words, or whatever, he by virtue of his physical presence, of his attitude – challenges [Sally's] framework.'⁷⁰ This rhetorical strategy signalled a crucial division between Fonda and Salt, and thus impacted on the rendering of Sally and Luke in *Coming Home*. Fonda's emphasis on representing change dialectically indicated her biographical investment in the

⁶⁸ Fonda quoted in 'Coming Home Story Conference' transcript (29 July 1976), folder 204, box 23, HA/AMPAS.

⁶⁹ Waldo Salt, 'Notes on Luke and Sally' (10 March 1976), folder 2, box 19, WSP/UCLA.

⁷⁰ Fonda quoted in 'Coming Home Story Conference' transcript (29 July 1976), folder 204, box 23, HA/AMPAS.

characterisations, and this was enhanced by the other ‘historical’ figures informing the film’s conception, most notably Kovic.

With allusions to both Fonda’s and Kovic’s processes of politicisation, *Coming Home* formed a biographical tapestry of anti-war sentiments that were mutually reinforcing. Kovic’s personal and political history informed *Coming Home*, not least because his autobiography was in the public domain during the film’s latter stages of development.⁷¹ More significantly, Kovic was extensively interviewed early into the film’s research process, before the publication of his memoir.⁷² The interview revealed his athletic background before becoming a paraplegic (referenced when Sally recalls to Vi Luke’s previous captaincy of the high school football team), his maltreatment in VA hospitals and, crucially, his self-proclaimed ‘renaissance’ through sex, which he described as ‘like learning to walk again’.⁷³ Kovic recounted in detail his visit to a Mexican whorehouse, and his emphasis on sex as a ‘healing process’ was consistent with the equivalent scenario in *Coming Home*. Taken in conjunction with Voight’s account of the paraplegic extras’ enthusiasm for Fonda’s sex appeal, and even her more conventional stint as Miss Army Recruiting 1962, Sally’s sexual representation can be viewed as an apologia to the soldiers she was seen to have ‘betrayed’ in her radical period. A review in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* suggested this bordered on a convenient amnesia for the star, of fairy-tale proportions: ‘Fonda is so convincing as a dutiful housewife who slowly awakens from the magic spell of life in the classic pattern, she makes us forget she was one of the earliest [sic]

⁷¹ Kovic’s memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*, was published in 1976, shortly after speaking at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. Fonda claims that Salt encouraged Kovic to write his memoir, thus creating an awareness of Kovic’s story in advance of the film’s release. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 361.

⁷² ‘Interview with Ron Kovic and Roger Steffens’ (15 October 1974), folder 10, box 19, WSP/UCLA. Salt and Gilbert were the interviewers.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

and most vocal anti-war critics. [...] Jon Voight is the offbeat Prince Charming whose touch startles Fonda's Sleeping Beauty into action.'⁷⁴ In this sense, Sally and Luke's love scene exhibited recuperative dimensions by demarcating clear gender divisions using a sexual/political binary. Sally experiences a sexual (feminine) awakening, whereas Luke embraces a political (masculine) cause; Fonda's radical involvement with the anti-war movement is therefore re-imagined in *Coming Home* as that of a 'sexual healer' to Luke, which both references Kovic's experiences and further elevates his activist-hero status in the film.

Luke-as-Kovic constituted a means of transferring 'radical focus' from Fonda, just as Redgrave-as-Julia had the previous year. This is exemplified in *Coming Home* when Sally and Vi are alerted to television coverage of Luke expressing his anti-war sentiments to local media, having chained himself to the gates of an army installation. Not only is Luke depicted in black and white and in close-up on the television screen, but Sally is – quite literally – the moderate bystander. Furthermore, Fonda and Kovic, just like Fonda and Redgrave, shared enough political territory to demonstrate, firstly, that Fonda's radicalisation in the early-1970s had not been an isolated incident, and secondly, that Kovic's maintenance of a radical image refracted these associations away from the recently 'reformed' Fonda. This dynamic was depicted in the left-leaning *New West* after the film's release. Surveying Hollywood's contemporaneous embrace of Vietnam, the magazine suggested Kovic's and Fonda's differing associations during the war had coalesced into a shared post-war 'maturity' suitable for the movies:

⁷⁴ Richard Cuskelly, 'Coming Home: Best Years of Our Lives for the '70s', *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (14 February 1978), p. B1.

Fonda – she was Kovic’s photographic negative. As fiercely as they wanted to avert their eyes from Kovic, they wanted to confront Hanoi Jane – stare her down, look at her body, cut her tongue out, have her officially declared *persona non grata*. What was guilt and pain with Kovic was blind lust and rage with Fonda. [...] Today, in 1978, they’ve come home. They’re respectable now, central figures in one of the most massive explosions of single-themed gambling in the history of Hollywood – Vietnam movies.⁷⁵

Fonda also consistently cited Kovic’s influence on the film after its release, which included quoting him at a promotional press conference for the Midwest, held in Chicago.⁷⁶ Kovic’s identity exhibited extra-textual dimensions of *Coming Home* in various subtle ways, too. In his interview with Salt, Kovic claimed his radicalisation was political, emotional, and also physical – he grew his hair and beard to indicate dissatisfaction with society. Making ideological statements through his ‘look’ obviously connected Kovic to the counter-cultural movement, but this also mirrored Fonda’s investment in the concept, a device used both within and without the parameters of *Coming Home*.

The politics of appearance

The visual transformation of ‘Barbarella’ into ‘Hanoi Jane’ is the hallmark of Fonda’s reputation for image change, but less has been observed of her post-Hanoi representation. During the making of *Coming Home*, Fonda demonstrated an acute

⁷⁵ Richard Turner, ‘The Worst Years of Our Lives’, *New Times* (20 March 1978), p. 55.

⁷⁶ ‘I may have lost my body, but I’ve gained my mind.’ Carmie Amata, ‘Rebel Jane’, *Plain Dealer (Cleveland)* (7 April 1978), p. 2. Fonda also used Kovic’s quote without directly attributing it to him in Honeycutt, ‘Five-Year Struggle’, p. D13.

awareness of the visual significance of costume and physicality. She suggested that Sally's conversion into a politicised woman be explicitly denoted by her changing appearance. Notes in a memo from Fonda to the senior creative and production team indicate that she had thought out the minutia of Sally's self-conscious appearance in exacting detail, from which the 'new' Sally could then break free: 'she occasionally goes to the market in curlers with a scarf over if she's quite sure her husband or his friends won't be around.'⁷⁷ Sally's shift in outward appearance was also given a biographical twist, indicating Fonda was once again representing her own experience:

Through the contact with Luke and the other vets and Vi, she begins to feel a need to make her own space which, like a lot of women (including myself in 1969) begins by wanting to shed the veneer and look like she looks, starting with her hair. [...] She one day shows up [at the VA hospital] having only washed it. Period. A revolutionary act, and very liberating.⁷⁸

In the cinematic text of *Coming Home*, this moment intersects with Luke's physical demeanour and suggests both characters are experiencing parallel changes. The first day Sally works at the hospital with her new hairstyle is the first scene Luke is depicted using a wheelchair, which he operates with a newly buoyant mood; both characters remark on their respective changes and the pairing of 'hair' and 'chair' is rhymed playfully by the exchange of dialogue, creating a sense of shared development. Crucially, the scene immediately prior to this encounter depicts Vi styling Sally's hair while she watches news footage of Vietnam on television. Sally's expression is framed tightly, exhibiting focus and seriousness in response to the

⁷⁷ Memo from Fonda to senior creative and production team, '*Coming Home* – Correspondence' (24 November 1976), folder 160, box 18, HA/AMPAS.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

images she witnesses, an ‘awakening’ of sorts. This segment thus informs the following scene with Sally and Luke, while also referring back to the *mise-en-scène* of an earlier scene set in Sally’s apartment in which she styles her hair in the ‘old’ way with the television broadcasting in the background. Rather than watch Robert Kennedy eulogise Martin Luther King onscreen in this sequence, Sally applies night cream to her face in a bulb-lined mirror, suggesting her political ignorance and beautification rituals are symptoms of a broader entrapment.

Fonda’s awareness of how image and appearance encoded notions of identity was not confined to the visual dimensions of *Coming Home*. Moreover, whilst being concerned with costuming details is arguably the stock-in-trade of a responsible performer, it is Fonda’s altered appearance in the press at large that casts Sally’s ‘shedding of the veneer’ in a somewhat contradictory light. As Sally was liberating herself by abandoning the feminine ‘façade’, Fonda was conversely re-embracing the glamorous elements of her stardom as proof of her investment in mainstream exposure. Specifically, Fonda equated furnishing an accessible media presence with a certain degree of compromise; as well as disassociating herself from her Barbarella period, Fonda’s pressing concern was creating distance between her contemporaneous persona and the radical activism that had marginalised her mainstream appeal considerably. In *Creative Differences*, a book of interviews and profiles published in 1978 charting Hollywood’s volatile relationship with ‘progressive’ personalities (covering before, during and after the blacklist era), Fonda rejected her ‘extreme sectarian period’, suggesting she had gained the political spotlight too soon.⁷⁹ Now

⁷⁹ David Talbot and Barbara Zheutlin, *Creative Differences: Profiles of Hollywood Dissidents* (Boston: South End Press, 1978), p. 140.

was the time, Fonda asserted, in line with press accounts of her new found ‘harmony’ with America’s political climate:

After years of involvement in political organizations [...] Fonda now feels that she is qualified to speak on behalf of progressive causes. She is better prepared to handle the media; she can often use it to her own advantage, rather than being constantly victimized by it. Fonda recognizes that she is not a political figure in the traditional sense; she is a “visible figure.”⁸⁰

This emphasis on the *visible* rather than the verbal provides a motivational context for Fonda’s scattershot approach to America’s magazine industry, and suggested that the key to Fonda abandoning her unpalatable radical image resided in image representation.

Although Fonda’s verbal distancing of her Barbarella and radical phases was consistently profiled in the media, her visual departure was more problematic. In the case of Barbarella, it exhibited a retrospective quality. As a means of juxtaposing the journey from Fonda’s ‘Hanoi Jane’ period to the release of *Coming Home*, two *Rolling Stone* covers provide a striking visual shorthand (fig. 8). That the metamorphic quality of Fonda’s image can be demonstrated via the same publication is noteworthy; what’s more, Annie Leibovitz shot each cover photo.⁸¹ The replication of publication and photographer thus magnifies Fonda as the agent of changes in her own image, so dramatically illustrated overleaf.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

⁸¹ *Rolling Stone* (25 May 1972) and *Rolling Stone* (9 March 1978).



Figure 8. *Rolling Stone* (25 May 1972) and (9 March 1978).
From 'Hanoi Jane' to Sally Hyde.

The 1972 cover published on the eve of Fonda's notorious 'Hanoi Jane' period, employs gritty portraiture that foreshadows her field-study approach to North Vietnam's plight. The black-and-white colouring of the photograph is allied more with newspaper reporting than glossy magazines and posits Fonda's image in a realm associated with investigative journalism and world events. In compositional terms, it has visual connections with the *Ms.* cover discussed earlier. The hand under the chin, nearly covering the mouth, fuses contemplation and shock; she appears as the movie-star conscience through which the dissenting 'face' of the war can be represented. Her gaze out of shot suggests an independence of thought beyond posing for the cover of a magazine.

Rolling Stone also served as a publishing platform for Fonda's journal detailing a second trip to North Vietnam in 1974, within which her travels with Hayden were transposed into an emotive witness-narrative, detailing the country's attempts at reconstruction.⁸² The journal became the basis for the documentary *Introduction to the Enemy* (1974), which sought to profile the human faces of an enemy otherwise depicted as 'faceless'. Notably, the director, Haskell Wexler, would later serve as cinematographer for *Coming Home* under Hal Ashby's direction. The cinematic modes of documentary and Hollywood narrative are ultimately contrasting apparatus, particularly with regard to thematic representation and audience size. Fonda's aspirations for tackling the political issues raised by Vietnam were thus inevitably tempered by structural elements and these covers under scrutiny epitomise the formal aspects of each mode.

The 1978 cover was promotional publicity for Fonda and her feature films. Accompanying *Coming Home*'s release, elements of Sally experiences in the film and Fonda's own previous incarnation as an international sex symbol are connoted. Her nudity in the shot is reminiscent of Sally's highly publicised sex scene where Luke orally brings her to orgasm. The windswept hair and soft focus are compositional symbols of this scene, given their (customary) associations with female beauty and pleasure. Conspicuous use of makeup and a sensuous gaze at the camera heighten the sense of 'performance' at work here: Fonda's image continues to reside in the abstract realm of photographic glamour even when the interview it promotes promises to 'reveal all'. In light of this abstraction, the image is not intrinsically associated with a particular time and place. Whereas the 1972 cover situated Fonda squarely in the

⁸² Jane Fonda, 'A Vietnam Journal: Rebirth of a Nation' *Rolling Stone* (4 July 1974), pp. 48-58.

context of the Vietnam War as an activist, this image presents an actress of enduring sexual appeal. In contrast to other cover text of this period, Fonda's age is not mentioned; the net effect of the cover's visual flattery of its subject thus elicits a 'timeless' spectacle: this image *could* be from 1968, for example. The associations of this image with Sally Hyde's nudity are also connected in a broader context to Fonda's nudity in her French films of the 1960s, *Barbarella* being the touchstone for American audiences. In *Rolling Stone*, Fonda's comments regarding the connections between these characters are illuminating: 'I was making *Barbarella* during the Tet Offensive at the very time Sally Hyde was going through all of that in *Coming Home*.'⁸³ This statement's blending of character and star enhances the implied temporal fluidity between time periods and renders Fonda's personal history an open cache to be transposed and reworked in the conventional parameters of a fiction film. It is indicative of the retrospective quality that *Coming Home* applied to Vietnam and Fonda's concurrent process of politicisation.

Unification

Brandishing its advantage of retrospection, the finished version of *Coming Home* mixed contemporary rhetoric and nostalgia, amalgamating aspects of Fonda's image and deflecting them onto characters in her midst. The film's opening shots around the pool table of a veterans' hospital are filmed in the *cinema-verité* style, a documentary technique that hereby acknowledges the extensive research with and actual use of paraplegic extras in the film. Dialogue is raw, as veterans grapple with the thorny

⁸³ Donald Katz, 'Jane Fonda: A Hard Act to Follow', *Rolling Stone* (9 March 1978), p. 41.

issue of their post-war hindsight and whether they would make different choices given the chance. The segue shot to the credit sequence is a slow zoom into Luke's pensive expression as he lays on a gurney and the soundtrack switches from veterans voices to the Rolling Stones. Anthems once part of a counter-cultural movement now accompany this polished feature film, imbuing the spectacle with a nostalgic dimension. Switching location to an unspecified army base, Bob Hyde jogs along a runway, automaton-like, with the lyrics commenting '*you're out of touch, my baby*'. The credit sequence proceeds to cross-cut between these locations, alluding to a yet unestablished relationship between them.

Marketing strategies of the film denoted that Fonda's character, Sally, would provide the common ground between the two men and their respective realms (fig. 9). Fonda's absence from the credit sequence thus implied that she would occupy the unrepresented yet soon to be shared territory of compliance and dissent, dramatised by the two opposing spaces. Indeed, Fonda's personal history indicated that she *had* occupied both spheres in her time, having been the most high profile anti-war activist ten years after posing as Miss Army Recruitment for 1962. The thematic structure of *Coming Home* is thus achieved through cinematic juxtaposition and the narrative thrust promises collision and conflict, situated on the melodramatic territory of the home front. Working through her dilemma of loyalty, enlightenment, and desire, Sally's infidelity provided an allegorical link to criticisms levelled at Fonda by swathes of Americans in public life who questioned her fidelity to her native country. The self destruction of Bob and the healing of Luke, representing symptoms of Sally's growth to political maturity, are also indicators of Fonda's emerging identity from her



Figure 9. Theatrical release poster for *Coming Home*.
 ‘A man who believed in war, a man who believed in nothing
 and a woman who believed in both of them.’

period of anti-war activism. Bob represents the conservative ethos that cannot adapt to the post-Vietnam world and Luke is the once-angry activist who closes the film, calmly conveying his version of events – which amount to a warning – to the next generation of would-be recruits.

Fonda’s activism informed the characterisations of *Coming Home*, and the ending of the film remains a nuanced anti-war statement affirming her political views. Bob’s drowning denotes on the one hand his inability to evolve beyond his conservative ideology. This inflexibility was a bugbear for Bruce Dern, who claimed in interviews accompanying the film’s release that he argued for Bob’s (and thus the veterans Dern claimed the character represented) perspective to be given greater

balance relative to that of Luke and Sally. Indeed, Dern asserts that he salvaged the ending of the film, which Salt had originally scripted as reaching a shoot out style climax between Bob and the state police.⁸⁴ Salt had conceived this denouement by reimagining a real-life event which had occurred some years before, whereby a Los Angeles Vietnam veteran captured two rangers and a hiker in the city's Griffith Park.⁸⁵ Yet the less 'gung-ho' ending that Dern ostensibly instigated is tempered by the fact that his death is itself an implicit allusion to James Mason's suicide in *A Star is Born* (1954), who also leaves his clothes on the beach and drowns himself in the Pacific off the California coast. Whether intended or not, this imagery locates Bob's death in the context of male inadequacy as measured by the rise of a female figure; the stardom of Vicki Lester (Judy Garland) outshines that of Norman Maine (Mason) in *A Star is Born*, and in *Coming Home* female ascendance is coded not just in Sally's emancipation but through the fact that the film in its totality is suffused with Fonda's identity as both star and anti-war activist.

Bob's self-destruction enhanced the saintliness of Luke's role as a 'survivor'; this affirmed Fonda's anti-war activism and also attracted institutional endorsement of considerable prominence. A major instance of this occurred when the senior team of *Coming Home* received a letter from The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington D.C., then represented by Harold Russell. Russell stated: 'I was very impressed by the movie and its excellent, honest presentation of disabled people. I think it will have a great effect on the future presentation of disabled people in films. [...] Whatever the President's Committee can do to help you

⁸⁴ Honeycutt, 'Five-Year Struggle', p. D13.

⁸⁵ John Mosqueda, 'Viet Veteran Holds 3 at Gunpoint in Park Before Surrendering', *Los Angeles Times* (4 August 1974), pp. 1, 3.

in promoting *Coming Home*, we are anxious to do.’⁸⁶ Not only was this letter a pledge of governmental support but Russell’s eminence derived from his role as disabled World War II veteran Homer Parrish in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), for which Russell won the Academy Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role as well as an honorary Academy Award ‘for bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans through his appearance’.⁸⁷ *The Best Years of Our Lives* also won the Best Picture Academy Award whereas *Coming Home* was nominated, yet lost out to the other major Vietnam film of 1978, *The Deer Hunter*. The Academy did reward Fonda and Voight’s performances, nonetheless, as well as the film’s procession of screenwriters.⁸⁸ *Coming Home* therefore received a host of industrial and governmental endorsements.

Russell’s support of the film and its ensuing success at the Academy Awards indicated *Coming Home* appealed on a political and industrial level respectively, as well as honouring the prestige of its cinematic forbearers. In a gesture saluting these many elements, Fonda attended the ceremony and accepted her Oscar in sign language. On one level this expressed Fonda’s respect for the complexities of disability in its multiple forms yet her decision to not speak was significant in other, wider contexts. Fonda had returned to Hollywood and exorcised her radical past through narrative form, receiving praise, recognition, and accolades of the highest order. Faced with the prospect of addressing the elite of the industry and the watching

⁸⁶ Letter from Harold Russell to senior production team, ‘Research and Reception’ (5 April 1978), folder 4, box 19, WSP/UCLA.

⁸⁷ http://awardsdatabase.oscars.org/ampas_awards/DisplayMain.jsp?curTime=1276399251021. Accessed 13 June 2010. Harold Russell lost his hands through a premature explosion. The hooks the character uses in place of his hands are therefore also those of the actor.

⁸⁸ Fonda and Voight were awarded Best Actress and Best Actor; Waldo Salt, Robert C. Jones, and Nancy Dowd won the award for Best Writing, Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen. The film also received nominations for Best Director, Best Actor in a Supporting Role (Dern), Best Actress in a Supporting Role, and Best Film Editing.

world, she chose a politicised gesture by ‘signing’ her speech; this highlighted an important issue yet, paradoxically, silenced her ‘voice’, which had elicited such vehement protest at the height of the Vietnam War. Simultaneously challenging and accessible, maverick and responsible, Fonda’s sign language ‘speech’ thus crystallised the spirit of her commercial-political stardom by performing a mute – yet provocative – visual act.

Conclusion

Largely vilified after visiting North Vietnam, mere photographs of Fonda in enemy territory instantly became inflammatory emblems for her detractors, who existed on both sides of the political spectrum.⁸⁹ In this sense, Fonda’s subsequent overtures to the American mainstream through photojournalism and commercial cinema were predisposed to ideological contradiction, although ultimately revealed her conspicuous awareness of stardom’s capacity as a recuperative visual construction. Stardom, for Fonda and Hayden, had become a mechanism in the superstructure of their political ambitions and 1978 proved an opportune year to blend the two. At his AFI tribute in March that year, Henry Fonda provided a glittering endorsement of such a union, suggesting that Hayden reminded him of the liberal heroes he played over the years, like Tom Joad, and even Lincoln.⁹⁰ Not to be outdone, the following month Jane Fonda revealed that she would consider running for office in the absence of a movie career.⁹¹ IPC Films had allowed Fonda to suffuse commercial movies with

⁸⁹ The most notorious and protracted case remains Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin’s short film *Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still* (1972). Through close semiotic analysis of a photograph featuring Fonda in Hanoi, they branded her activism inescapably and systemically bourgeois.

⁹⁰ Steve Zall, ‘Speaker of the Times Jane Fonda’ *T.G.I.F. Casting News* (April 1978), p. 10.

⁹¹ Nancy Baltad, ‘Happy Ms. Fonda Looks to Fresh Challenge, Goals’ *Los Angeles Times* (23 April 1978), p. 2.

politics and the implications of such a venture would dramatically intensify in scale with her next film, *The China Syndrome*.

Chapter Four

***The China Syndrome* (1979) and *Nine to Five* (1980):**

The Commercial-Political Formula of IPC Films

‘Very few people will have come out of the cinema after seeing *The China Syndrome* without feeling that they have been entertained. And very few will not think twice next time they listen to the soothing evasions of the nuclear authorities. And that is what Fonda is after.’

Herman and Downing, *All American Anti-Heroine*, p.
137.

‘If a huge portion of the 20 million office secretaries and clerks in the United States soon become union members, they may hail Karen Nussbaum as the spark of a campaign that changed the nature of U.S. organized labor. However, more likely, if pink collar workers do become a dominant force in U.S. unions, their heroines will be Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton, stars of the film, *Nine to Five*.’

Harry Bernstein, ‘Film *Nine to Five* Sparks Interest in
Unionization of Office Workers’,
Los Angeles Times (6 March 1981), p. 3.

‘So Fonda, the embodiment of the Protestant work ethic, has constructed a life that enables her to make a great deal of money without sacrificing her principles, using the system she criticizes to finance and deliver her messages.’

Maureen Orth, ‘The Education of Jane Fonda: A Late Blooming Business Woman’, *Savvy* (February 1982), p. 32.

Introduction

At the heart of Jane Fonda’s production company lay an explicit design for fusing commercial filmmaking with her wider political agenda. Of the five feature films produced by IPC Films between 1978 and 1981, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*, in particular, forged links with the contemporaneous political issues they had set out to address. Sandwiched between *Coming Home*’s retrospective portrait of the Vietnam home front set in 1968, and *Rollover* (1981), which depicted a potential doomsday scenario of America’s economic near-future, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* engaged overtly with the American political *present* rather than its past, or the complexities of its fiscal future.¹ As *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby observed of *The China Syndrome* upon its release, ‘the film is as topical as this morning’s weather report’.² *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* offered left-leaning portraits of the nuclear power industry and the exploitation of female office workers respectively, yet each film also adopted conspicuously different approaches

¹ Period detail aside, the melodrama *On Golden Pond* (1981) also could have conceivably been set at any point in the post-war period. Moreover, *On Golden Pond* is an anomalous IPC production insofar as it does not explicitly address a political issue. It was, notably, the most commercially successful of the five IPC films released and will be discussed at length in a later chapter.

² Vincent Canby, ‘Nuclear Plant is Villain in *China Syndrome*’, *New York Times* (16 March 1979), p. C16.

to their subject matter in terms of generic format and cinematic allusions.³ The question remains, therefore, how Fonda's star persona functioned across and between these films, and the extent to which the commercial and political configuration central to IPC revealed a parallel shift in Fonda's activism and stardom during this period.

This chapter explores Fonda's engagement with *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* in a cinematic context and within the political spheres of which she had become a celebrity spokesperson and symbol alongside her husband, Tom Hayden. The first two sections chart the origins of IPC Films using Fonda's filmic and political histories in both Europe and America: Jean Luc-Godard's *Tout Va Bien* (1972) and the American anti-war movement each furnished Fonda's 'radical stardom' in different ways during the early-1970s, yet both provide key contexts in which the impetus of IPC's scheme to produce commercially viable political cinema should be considered. How the 'issues' of nuclear power and women office workers took shape as commercial features implies Fonda's approach to cinema encompassed political pragmatism that was amenable to Hollywood; I subsequently focus, therefore, on the source material, development, and production histories of *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*. Controlling IPC as both its producer and its star constituted Fonda's explicit attempt to politicise commercial cinema on one level, yet this stratagem also transmuted and 'repackaged' her previous radicalisation stealthily, in a mainstream narrative format. The 'final' cinematic texts of *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* from this perspective encode the parameters of 'commercial-political' cinema within a specific historical context. As such, the closing sections of this chapter assess the reception and grassroots impact of *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* using

³ A conspiracy thriller, *The China Syndrome* represented a late addition to this genre while the office setting of *Nine to Five* was reminiscent of comedies made during Hollywood's 'Golden Age', such as *His Girl Friday* (1940).

published primary sources, with particular focus on the relationship of the former film to the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island. These items reveal the construction of Fonda's media presence and her parallel occupancy of cinematic and political realms in relation to these films. In Gary Herman and David Downing's contemporaneous biography of Fonda, writing when she was at the height of her commercial-political stardom, the authors mused 'it is no coincidence [...] that in both politics and the cinema she has chosen to follow the traditional American way in her search for an untraditional America'.⁴ In short, this quest is herein under consideration.

'Taking over the factory': The impact of *Tout Va Bien* on IPC Films

Assessing the components of IPC Films involves an exploration of the contexts within which the company was originally conceived and those in which its films were exhibited. As outlined above, Fonda's creation of IPC allowed her to make films over which she wielded significant control and influence. This was partly in response to the stigma she then faced in Hollywood but also reflected the 'powerlessness' she had felt as an actress working outside of it with radical left-wing directors, such as Jean-Luc Godard. In December 1971 Fonda flew to France to film *Tout Va Bien*, Godard's avant-garde portrait of a wildcat strike in a sausage factory, through which he mused the political gains and losses four years on from the events of May 1968.⁵ Fonda starred as American correspondent Susan de Witt (or simply 'She'), who visits the factory and as a result of her experiences begins to see her entire life, including her relationship with Jacques/'He' (Yves Montand), in politicised terms. Far from this being the liberating experience depicted onscreen, Fonda claims in her autobiography

⁴ Herman and Downing, *All American Anti-Heroine*, p. 140.

⁵ *Tout Va Bien* was released in France in 1972.

that she accepted to star in the film purely because of Godard's status as a political filmmaker and swiftly came to regret her decision when she received a script she describes as 'incomprehensible'. Fonda 'didn't want to be used by [Godard] to get financing for something with politics that seemed obscure and sectarian'.⁶ Nevertheless the film went ahead and had a limited release in the United States during early 1973, making it one of her least known films by American standards.

Despite Fonda's palpable regret for making *Tout Va Bien*, the work's place within her stardom and career offers crucial ways of understanding the conception of IPC Films. In her autobiography, Fonda is loathe to discuss *Tout Va Bien*, yet biographies written in the midst of her IPC period make notable mention of the film in relation to her later roles. The most undeveloped (and misleading) of these is by Fred Lawrence Guiles who makes the observation: 'The idea behind [*Tout Va Bien*] was biographical, drawn from Godard's notion of how Jane herself had been radicalized overnight [*sic*] by the student strike [of 1968].'⁷ Herman and Downing on the other hand go much further by asserting 'no matter how limited *Tout Va Bien* was to prove as a film, it's importance to Fonda's subsequent career cannot be understated'.⁸ The film provided two key legacies, they argue, for Fonda's later exercises in mainstream political cinema. Firstly, Fonda gravitated towards films in the late-1970s that represented a 'social reality, in the normal Marxist way, as an organic entity. [...] During her two years of political activism [up to 1972] she had come to believe very strongly that as there were no individual solutions in life, so too should there be none in movies.'⁹ The characters that Fonda played under the auspices of IPC Films,

⁶ Fonda, *My Life so Far*, p. 278.

⁷ Guiles, *The Actress in Her Time*, p. 185.

⁸ Herman and Downing, *All American Anti-Heroine*, p. 105.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

therefore, would typically face plausible dilemmas within recognisable situations – everyday people facing everyday problems. Herman and Downing identify *Tout Va Bien*'s second legacy as 'the notion of politicisation through a particular character. [...] Fonda's experience of playing Susan de Witt must have brought home to her the potential inherent in the device.'¹⁰ Fonda's characters in IPC narratives therefore embark on transformative processes comparable to Susan's politicisation in *Tout Va Bien*.

Herman and Downing's observations provide a credible explanation for the IPC politicisation model and also offer insights into how these biographers – writing in the late-1970s for a book published in 1980 – perceived Fonda at the height of her commercial-political stardom. In particular, the authors suggested that the device of depicting a character politicised by his or her circumstances was distinctly limited within Godard's oeuvre because his penchant for Brechtian devices called attention to film form, and therefore exposed the explicit 'role' that actors play. Rather, politicised characters were better placed in Fonda's later films, they argued, because her 'Method portrayal, by adding emotional truth to political sense, would lead audiences toward the light.'¹¹ As cinematic narratives in their own right, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* represented characters' journeys to self-awareness inflected with a moderate feminist agenda. This proved a fundamental strategy for Fonda's recuperating place within America's national consciousness, as it mapped out a journey from political 'innocence' to political 'experience' that navigated around rather than through the terrain of radical activism. The implicit message was that Fonda's persona could

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

transmute and encode cinematic and dramaturgical techniques of even the most radical 'New Wave' directors, thus repackaging them for the Hollywood market.

The comedy *Nine to Five* commences with the arrival of Judy Bernly (Fonda) at the offices of Consolidated Industries, starting her first day working as a secretary after, we later learn, a messy divorce. She becomes the charge of Violet Newstead (Lily Tomlin), a seasoned and efficient but conspicuously undervalued office supervisor who, in turn, answers to the boss/villain of the film, Franklin Hart (Dabney Coleman). Hart's secretary, Doralee Rhodes (Dolly Parton) is the object of his unwanted affections, which frequently veer into full blown sexual harassment of farcical proportions. When Hart's actions cause each of the women to abandon their posts for the afternoon and drown their sorrows at the local bar, they realise their common grievances and begin to fantasise about retribution. This is the point at which the film shifts gears, resulting in the three protagonists imprisoning Hart in his own home and telling the rest of the workers that he is away on business. A radical overhaul of the office's operational framework ensues, allowing an explicit representation of how the working environment of Consolidated Industries could function under 'new' (i.e. cooperative and self-governing) management. At the close of the film, Hart escapes from his captivity only to be congratulated for his office 'innovations' by the Chairman of the Board (Sterling Hayden), who feels Hart's 'skills' could be utilised in the company's South American division. Individual epilogues featuring in the credits reveal Violet's promotion to Vice President, Judy's remarriage, and Doralee's subsequent career as a country and western singer.

In a markedly different tone, *The China Syndrome* was Hollywood's first feature set largely within the nuclear power industry. A conspiracy thriller, the film starred Fonda as Kimberly Wells, a 'soft news' reporter commended primarily for her looks, who yearns to cover serious events. While filming an energy special in the Ventana nuclear plant, Kimberly and her cameraman Richard Adams (Michael Douglas) witness a serious control room incident that the plant's supervisor, Jack Godell (Jack Lemmon), seems unable to control. Richard surreptitiously films the event as a scoop but the story is suppressed by the news station after pressure from the authorities at Ventana. Furious at the concealment of the plant's potential hazards, Richard quits his contract and steals the unaired story. Kimberly is ordered to locate the film and discovers Richard screening the footage to two nuclear experts, who tell Richard and Kimberly that the situation they witnessed could have 'rendered an area the size of Pennsylvania permanently uninhabitable'. Meanwhile, the plant incident is internally investigated and Ventana is hastily given the all-clear, ultimately to protect corporate profits. Jack is initially satisfied with the investigation, but after Kimberly informs him of the nuclear experts' judgements, he uncovers critical safety compromises in Ventana's infrastructure and realises it could experience a meltdown instantaneously. Jack confronts the representative of Ventana's construction company, who threatens him with retribution. Recognising he is under surveillance, Jack attempts to supply evidence of Ventana's safety breaches to Kimberly through a third party but these documents are intercepted by force. Panicked and left with no recourse, Jack hijacks Ventana's control room and demands that Kimberly interview him on-air to expose the plant's safety violations. Once on-air, Jack's language is awash with confusing scientific jargon and before Kimberly can decipher his message for the public, the transmission feed is severed by Ventana's chief executive. A

SWAT team already despatched, responding to Jack's seizure of the plant, breaches the control room and shoots Jack in front of Kimberly. As he lies dying, Ventana experiences a near meltdown, bearing out Jack's fears. The crisis subsides and Kimberly, jostling for position with other reporters outside the plant, interviews Jack's deputy who claims he was a hero and died fighting for what he believed in. Kimberly's bosses commend her handling of the situation as she breaks down, traumatised, having penetrated the world of 'hard news'.

Biographical portraits suggesting *Tout Va Bien* provided the basic framework for IPC Films have remained largely limited to discussions of Fonda's 'politicised woman' motif, exemplified by characters like Sally Hyde, Kimberly Wells, and, to a lesser extent, Judy Bernly. Adopting such a tight focus, however, overlooks the wider associations that Fonda had hitherto cultivated in relation to concepts of power within American society. The impact of Fonda's star image on *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* in light of *Tout Va Bien* endowed each of their 'messages' with a dimension inextricably linked to her 'personal' (and highly publicised) political history, which included a radical awakening. Thomas Kiernan, whose biography was published in 1982, echoed Herman and Downing's assessment of Godard's 'unintentional' impact on Fonda. He stated that:

Susan de Witt was the precursor of many of the roles that would later revitalize Jane's career. As well, the experience she underwent was one essentially of arriving at a recognition of the difference between the way things are and the way they are made to seem. She underwent the experience on one level through her character, on another as Jane Fonda working under

the direction of Jean-Luc Godard. Thus it was not only Susan de Witt who was politicized, it was Jane too.¹²

By emulating Herman and Downing's comments regarding *Tout Va Bien*, Kiernan inadvertently reveals blindspots in the biographical approach to Fonda's IPC projects. The 'politicised woman' narrative device was a conspicuous and successful element of Fonda's stardom yet it ultimately constituted the engine of a larger political vehicle, namely IPC Films. The question remains, therefore, whether IPC – as the apparatus of Fonda's stardom and production interests – merely reinforced, or notably enlarged, the political parameters of mainstream Hollywood films. In this regard, discussing *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* as complementary rather than incongruous spectacles suggests Fonda's politicised star image provided the connective tissue between the commercial realm of Hollywood and the wider political setting.

The generic formats of the two films represent their most glaring difference yet should not disguise the common ideology linking *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*. On a basic visual level, for example, the films are strikingly different; *The China Syndrome* employs an 'eyewitness news' device as part of its pre-credit sequence that structures the narrative thrust thereafter; *Nine to Five*, conversely, commences with Judy's first day at the office, a setting reminiscent of screwball comedies like *The Front Page* (1931). Lighting, colour, costume, and *mise-en-scène* in each film amounts to a vastly dissimilar spectacle when considered in isolation, yet like *Tout Va Bien*, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* were executed with a

¹² Kiernan, *Heroine for Our Time*, p. 281.

portrait of power as their overall focus. Whereas Godard employed a conspicuous, Brechtian presentation of political themes, IPC consciously sought to entertain and politicise symbiotically through focusing on specific topical issues. The narrative device thereby unifying *Tout Va Bien* and IPC Films is the dramatisation of a ‘mutinous event’ in each scenario. *The China Syndrome* provides the more dramatic example, as Jack Godell’s hijacking of the Ventana nuclear plant is in direct response to his discoveries of critical safety breaches. His realisation that the plant is unsafe also leads him to uncover the endemic corruption of those employing him and his ‘heroic’ death leaves Ventana’s management with the blood of this ‘common man’ on their hands. In this sense, *The China Syndrome* concerns itself more with the moral and ethical abuses of power rather than the explicitly political, but the spectacle of Godell in operational control of the Ventana plant, however briefly, remains an apposite allusion to the workers taking over the factory in *Tout Va Bien*. Both *Tout Va Bien* and *The China Syndrome* are set within metaphorically potent industries – food and energy respectively – for exploring the implications of the power of the few over the many. Fonda was keen to stress the universality of this theme, telling the *New York Times* on the eve of the film’s release ‘the movie’s intended as an attack on greed, not on nuclear energy. If I intended to attack nuclear energy, I would have made a documentary.’¹³ Conversely, Fonda presented her involvement in *Nine to Five* as candidly political. Her unofficial ‘promotion’ of the film included addressing secretaries’ rallies and urging them to pull together as a labour force: ‘We are entering a critical period in history where the pie is shrinking and inflation is rising, and the people who are going to suffer the most are those on the lowest rung of the ladder, the

¹³ Harnetz, ‘Fallout from *China Syndrome*’, p. D19.

office workers.’¹⁴ Fonda’s approach to the central issue of the film in the public eye therefore constituted an attempt to endow *Nine to Five* with more explicit political overtones.

Nine to Five was conceived as an acute exercise in importing political content into mainstream narrative form. It may seem counter-intuitive to identify *Nine to Five* as the more ambitious political film given the apparent distance between its comedic format and the documentary approach that Fonda alludes to above as the ‘proper’ mode to tackle ‘real issues’ such as nuclear power. A general comparison between specific narrative and plot points of *Tout Va Bien* and *Nine to Five*, however, reveals that this ostensibly ‘innocuous’ comedy is actually loaded with subversive ideas and sequences relevant to its French predecessor, with Fonda’s star image constituting the nexus between them. As identified in *The China Syndrome*, *Nine to Five* features a significant ‘mutinous event’. Rather than this event constituting the suspenseful climax of the film, though, the kidnapping of Franklin Hart in *Nine to Five* functions as the film’s central axis and therefore forges a more persistent link to the wildcat strike scenario of *Tout Va Bien*. Hart’s management style is established from the outset as dictatorial, sexist, professionally inhibitive, and unethical. He is also presented as a buffoon and is thus reminiscent of the satirical representation of the factory boss in *Tout Va Bien*. That both Hart and the boss of *Tout Va Bien* are overthrown by force is notable, although each film’s handling of this event is significantly different. At the start of *Tout Va Bien* the factory workers have already dealt with the boss and are in control of the setting’s space and resources. In the case of *Nine to Five*, Hart’s ousting is concealed from the rest of the workers but it

¹⁴ Fonda addressing 800 members of Women Office Workers, the New York chapter of Working Women, quoted in Judy Klemesrud, ‘Jane Fonda to Office Workers: “Organize”’, *New York Times* (26 September 1979), p. C12.

crucially shown to the audience explicitly, including scenes of Hart being tied up, gagged, shot at, and blackmailed. These scenes, in tandem with Judy's fantasy sequence where Hart is hunted down by the office workers in the form of an angry mob (led by a secondary character previously fired for discussing her salary), come closest to the critique of capitalist, patriarchal power informing the narrative thrust of *Tout Va Bien*.

Although differing significantly as cinematic ventures, *Tout Va Bien* and *Nine to Five* nevertheless share some comparable strategies for the inclusion of political content. When the workers of *Tout Va Bien* recount their frustrations with their jobs to Susan and Jacques, Godard inserts 'simulations' whereby Susan and Jacques are seen to be carrying out those duties. Empathy, therefore, is visually represented as the first step toward a political consciousness according to Godard's vision. The equivalent fantasy sequences of *Nine to Five*, however, in which Hart is thrice deposed by each woman in turn, solicit the empathy of the audience by presenting Hart's fate as comedic, and well deserved. These portraits of overthrowing a despotic boss also rest on the audience's complicity with the idea of insurrection and represent a stealthy first step toward subverting the status quo.

As well as fantasy sequences and mutinous events, both *Tout Va Bien* and *Nine to Five* rely on imparting information as a means of empowering their audiences. *Tout Va Bien* presents explicit facts through either voice-over narration or characters' to-camera addresses about the continued merger of food companies in France. This, the film argues, will result in the food industry being run by a few conglomerates, alluding to the expansion of a 'powerless' majority. In addressing its political

concerns, *Nine to Five* embeds these implicitly within incidental dialogue and situations very early in the narrative. Issues alluded to in the film's first thirty-five minutes include the limited opportunities of women and ethnic minorities in the workplace, the promotion of male workers over their more experienced female counterparts, objections to carrying out 'personal shopper' duties for male bosses, the unavailability of flexible part-time hours, and sexual harassment. This is an impressive accomplishment in its own right, but the film's key attribute is its subsequent depiction of the change in working practices it is committed to politically. Come the film's end, Hart's oppressive 'factory line' style office has been taken over and transformed into a haven of progressive working initiatives: Violet provides the Chairman of the Board with a rundown of the office's new flexitime and job sharing programmes, day care centre, falls in absenteeism, and a twenty percent rise in overall productivity. Ethnic minority and disabled staff hitherto presented in marginalised functions within the film are also more visible at the close of the narrative, suggesting an affirmative action hiring policy.¹⁵ While these sequences verge on the propagandistic, the dual commitment to both politics and entertainment with which they have been conceived suggest that *Nine to Five* is not as easily dismissed as Fonda's biographers propose.¹⁶ Rather, *Tout Va Bien* ignited the spark of an idea which became Fonda's beacon for the mainstream, *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*, in turn, were manifestations of her progress and tenacity.

A crucial dimension of the IPC dramaturgy as compared to *Tout Va Bien* was the configuration of Fonda's roles in relation to the other major characters/stars

¹⁵ For example, an African American supporting character named Eddie is resentful that Judy is hired with no experience when he is 'trapped' in a mail room job.

¹⁶ Kiernan recounted: '*Nine to Five*, when it was released in late 1980, served only to further dilute the seriousness with which Jane had been taken after *The China Syndrome*.' Kiernan, *Heroine for Our Time*, p. 312.

featuring in these films. As discussed in relation to *Julia* (a proto-IPC film in this sense), Vanessa Redgrave-as-Julia functioned to transfer ‘radical focus’ away from both Fonda-as-Lillian Hellman and Fonda in her own right – the persistent extremism of Redgrave’s politics made Fonda look moderate by association. In *Coming Home*, the associations of Luke’s story with Ron Kovic was a reminder that Vietnam had radicalised even the most ardently patriotic foot-soldiers, and people like Sally/Fonda had merely been swept up into this activist vortex. The ‘politicised bystander’ motif duly persisted in *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*. For example, in his diatribe against the film, right-wing commentator George Will described the character of Richard Adams (Michael Douglas) as ‘a bearded Daniel Ellsberg type’.¹⁷ With the Ellsberg case having been a factor precipitating the Watergate crisis, Richard thus elicited leftist political associations and also is presented as the ‘maverick’ of the film through both costume/appearance and his character’s radical actions (Richard’s illegal filming of Ventana’s control room sets the conspiracy narrative in motion). Kimberly’s costume, appearance, and actions, on the other hand, are structured around her desire to be taken seriously in the first place. This is encapsulated in the film’s pre-credit sequence whereby Kimberly is framed within a television monitor of the station’s control room and unseen producers discuss her looks while Kimberly exclaims ‘Is anyone listening to me?’ Kimberly’s pursuit of serious news stories dramatised limitations imposed on women commended primarily for their looks; in *The China Syndrome* Fonda’s sex appeal is acknowledged and reconciled within a context of vocational ambition, echoing Sally Hyde’s growth into an ostensibly ‘fulfilled’ woman. Crucially, however, Kimberly’s political representation occupied the middle ground between the conservative caution of her television bosses and

¹⁷ George Will, ‘A Film About Greed’ *Newsweek* (2 April 1979), p. 4.

Richard's lust for radical action: Kimberly's journey thus functioned as both the vehicle and resolution for the film's debate over dissenting against corporate elites.

Nine to Five grafted Fonda's star associations onto the surrounding characters in an acute fashion. In a promotional interview for the film, Fonda admitted '[Tomlin and Parton] steal the movie and I'm delighted'.¹⁸ This statement is intriguing, given Fonda's centrality in IPC's other films. The process of co-stars embodying stock aspects of her star image in order for Fonda to occupy the 'bystander's' role is taken to an extreme with Judy Bernly. The pivotal injustices depicted in *Nine to Five* are conveyed through Violet's experiences and Tomlin responds with a radical edge, rendering Fonda's Judy in even more acquiescent tones. When Hart declines to promote Violet in favour of a junior male colleague, it is left to Tomlin to spell out the politics of the 'glass ceiling' for the audience through dialogue and gesture; this 'cause' is news to Judy, also, whose slim backstory is that of a dutiful housewife. Violet is thus the firebrand of *Nine to Five*, telegraphed playfully by Tomlin's acerbic delivery and Ann Roth's subtle use of brooding black and fiery red for the character's series of costumes. Parton, meanwhile, is so voluptuous that sexual appeal becomes almost caricatured, thus offsetting expectations for Fonda to address the topic through her characterisation. Doralee's costumes emphasise her breasts through tight waists and low necklines, in contrast to Judy's modest dress and mousy physicality. Indeed, Parton's demeanour is such that female sexual appeal is presented as 'wholesome' rather than anything to be renegotiated; accordingly, *Glamour* magazine even described Parton as 'America's nicest sex symbol since Betty Grable'.¹⁹

¹⁸ Fonda quoted in Bruce McCabe, 'Jane Fonda Goes to Work' *Boston Globe Living Section* (14 December 1980), p. 1.

¹⁹ Cliff Jahr, 'Dolly, Lily and Jane...', *Glamour* (February 1981), p. 136.

If Fonda's character lacked a firm connection to the political and sexual elements of her stardom, it is through stressing the solidly cooperative nature of her female clique that Judy is given status; she is, after all, the catalyst for change in this narrative format. In the final scene, for example, the trio toast Hart's departure dressed in the patriotic colours of red (Violet), white (Doralee) and blue (Judy) connoting a renewed faith in the 'American way'. Far from being the isolated, politicised figure of *Tout Va Bien*, Fonda had proven that radical cinematic rhetoric could – and perhaps should – be 'lost in translation' when courting the American mainstream with commercial-political cinema.

The sources and strategies of IPC Films

Despite its commercial successes during later years, the initiation of IPC Films actually derived from Fonda's most unpopular period in the wake of her anti-war activism. Referring in 1982 to her reasons for forming IPC nearly a decade earlier, Fonda told the *New York Times*: 'Nixon was President and I couldn't get a job. I can't say I was blacklisted, but I was graylisted. I was disillusioned [...] by the cowardice of people who didn't disagree with my stand against the Vietnam War but who didn't dare give me a job.'²⁰ Consequently, Fonda's desire to break back into Hollywood movies found support amongst anti-war activists, whose concerns she had publicly embraced. The most receptive of these was Bruce Gilbert, a UC Berkeley graduate who had majored in psychology 'while moonlighting as a campus radical'.²¹ Like Fonda, Gilbert had been raised in a privileged environment, although without links to

²⁰ Aljean Harmetz, 'Jane Fonda: She Makes Ideas Pay at Box Office', *New York Times* (25 March 1982), p. C17.

²¹ Corby Kummer, 'Soon to be a Major Mogul', *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (18 January 1981), *Nine to Five* clippings collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, USA [hereafter AMPAS].

the film world. They met in 1971 when Fonda enrolled her daughter Vanessa at the preschool Gilbert was running in Berkeley. Having already completed *Klute*, and feeling that the industry offered slim pickings for a politicised actress, Fonda was disillusioned with Hollywood and credits Gilbert with keeping her interested in pursuing a screen career over the long term. Fonda was also drawn to Gilbert politically through his involvement with Anthony Russo's co-defence in the 1971 Pentagon Papers trial, during which Gilbert had publicised the actual content of the papers. The following year, Gilbert co-ordinated Fonda and Hayden's speaking tour, which travelled under the banner of the Indochina Peace Campaign.²² It was during this period that the initial idea for *Coming Home* was conceived; Gilbert became Fonda's partner in IPC Films, and their strategy for imparting a political message to 'the many' by working within the parameters of Hollywood features took shape.

Political pragmatism constituted the original *raison d'être* of IPC, as a means of Fonda regaining mainstream exposure without abandoning her activist agenda. This has led to a skewed scholarly focus on *Coming Home* as the pre-eminent IPC project, given Fonda's associations with its political topic and the influence she wielded over its cinematic representation. Yet given IPC's wider objective – the mass consumption of political issues in commercial form – *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* also represented opportunities to package and extol the virtues of contemporaneous political movements. In this sense, these IPC projects harboured substantially less risk for Fonda's image: if *Coming Home* constituted a 'sanitised' portrait of her recent anti-war activity, the two IPC films that followed had the potential to cut loose from

²² Ibid.

their predecessor's retrospection and stimulate the political base Fonda and Hayden were concurrently attempting to build through their CED movement.

Cinema audiences constituted the principal focus of IPC's commercial-political strategies and Kiernan's 1982 biography credits Gilbert with the audience 'politicisation' concept that informed IPC's dramaturgical model. According to Kiernan, Gilbert articulated the approach to cinema that Fonda had been searching for since her political awakening of the early-1970s:

[S]tart with an ordinary individual solidly wedded to society's traditional values and beliefs. Place that character in a story whereby he, or she, as a result of the logical flow of appropriate events, undergoes a deep emotional experience and becomes politicized by it, i.e., awakened to the reality he or she never realized existed before. Have that awakening reality struggle against the old, safe illusions and beliefs. In that way, the character will gain the audience's sympathy. Then, when the character's new reality triumphs over his or her old illusions, and when the character is transported into a greater political awareness, the audience will have no choice but to follow. It too will become politicized.²³

Kiernan's account falls foul of his own tendency to regard the men in Fonda's life as puppeteers of sorts, to whom she responded obligingly with appropriate performances. He portrays the IPC *modus operandi* as wholly Gilbert's idea, whereas Fonda's autobiography suggests her own agency was also a factor: 'Because of the

²³ Kiernan, *Heroine for Our Time*, p. 301.

profound changes I'd experienced over the previous five years [1969-1974], I had a new sense of the possibility of personal transformation and wanted to use films as a catalyst for this process.'²⁴ *Tout Va Bien*, which falls squarely into the period Fonda refers to here, represented a proto-type for the politicisation model Fonda was keen to realise. The recurrent character trajectory of a woman's individual awakening within each IPC production also indicated that if the concept had been articulated by Gilbert initially, it was manifestly co-opted by Fonda to privilege representation of an emerging feminist consciousness rather than a generalised 'politicisation'. Add to this Fonda's acknowledgement that '[m]any of CED's concerns found their way into movies I would subsequently make'²⁵ and Tom Hayden's impact on the content and presentational mode of IPC also emerges as a significant factor. Indeed, to recount the history of IPC's journey to Hollywood is primarily a process of identifying its cast of politicised players; these were not simply screen characters or anti-war activists, but, moreover, were individuals that provided potent and symbolic source material for the issues the company sought to represent.

In adopting an antagonistic political agenda during the 1970s, Fonda had become associated with a multitude of dissenters interrogating many aspects of American life. The 'Hanoi Jane' episode, however, rendered her emblematic of this movement to the point of isolation – Fonda's activism remained curiously fetishised in the public eye as, amongst other things, a betrayal of male ideas of 'femininity', and perhaps even functioned as a conduit for anger against the women's movement. In this regard, the films IPC planned to make constituted a means for embedding Fonda's activism within a constellation of political movements and events

²⁴ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 359.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

sybiotically, particularly those featuring notable female campaigners. Whereas Fonda had actively encouraged links between *Coming Home* and the plight of Ron Kovic (perhaps in an effort to appease the anger of veterans prone to misogyny), the original inspirations for *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* were each attributable to female activists from the spheres of nuclear energy and the rights of female office workers respectively.

The women informing the ideas that eventually became *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* provided markedly different source material, from which each film took shape. Both films also embarked on complex developmental journeys from source to screen. Although *Nine to Five* appeared more ‘removed’ from its political topic given its lightness of tone, it did in fact enjoy an easier path to production and thus was executed largely as it had been intended by the filmmakers. Fonda was first alerted to the plight of women office workers by Karen Nussbaum, with whom she had toured the country under the original auspices of the Indochina Peace Campaign.²⁶ Nussbaum had spearheaded a Boston based group called ‘9to5’ whilst working as a secretary at Harvard University, formed in response to the inequalities experienced by female clerical workers. 9to5 was not seeking to unionise at first, nor did it identify itself as part of the women’s movement, but it eventually unified with similar groups that had formed independently in other American cities under a collective title, Working Women.²⁷ It was at this point in the late-1970s that Fonda recounts becoming interested in bringing this organisation’s agenda to the screen. Crediting Nussbaum as her initiator into the issue at large, Fonda writes in her

²⁶ A national speaking tour conducted by Fonda, Hayden and other anti-war campaigners in the autumn of 1972, ‘aimed at exposing Nixon’s escalation of the war and reenergizing the peace movement’. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 334.

²⁷ Philip Shabecoff, ‘March of the Nine-to-Five Woman’, *New York Times* (29 March 1981), p. F8.

autobiography: ‘Karen told me about sexual harassment, about women being on the job fifteen years and seeing men they trained get promoted right past them [...] and about clerical workers at some of the wealthiest banks who were paid so little they were eligible for food stamps.’²⁸ Advance publicity for *Nine to Five*, however, either declined to mention or made only a passing reference to Nussbaum, by then the head of Working Women. Instead, events such as Fonda’s attendance at a secretaries’ rally in San Francisco during 1979 set the tone for reporting the issue. The *New York Times* commenced a contemporaneous article with: ‘Employers be forewarned. The poor little working girl has some powerful new friends,’ referring to Fonda.²⁹ That is not to say Fonda actively sought to hijack the cause for herself, but rather that her high-profile embrace of Working Women’s agenda functioned as a ‘symbolic consciousness’ for the issue’s would-be ‘infantry’ of workaday secretaries.³⁰

When *Nine to Five* was released in late-1980 the issues it addressed were embedded within a deliberately ‘accessible’ comedic format. Many of the concerns espoused by Karen Nussbaum’s Working Women were transplanted directly into the film’s representation of new office ‘policies’, such as job sharing, and represented triumphantly as part of the film’s ‘happy ending’. This strategy drew less on Nussbaum’s accomplishments as an individual (which had not received significant press at this point) and more on what she and her organisation stood for. *Nine to Five* therefore sought to represent organisational as well as individual change.

²⁸ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 410.

²⁹ Ann Crittenden, ‘Interest in Unionizing Increases Among Female Office Workers’, *New York Times* (9 July 1979), p. A14.

³⁰ Notably, it was Nussbaum who absorbed Fonda’s ‘representative’ role for the issue in the wake of the film’s success. This is discussed later in the chapter.

The activist providing the inspiration for *The China Syndrome* functioned in an entirely different manner. Fonda had hoped to dramatise the story of Karen Silkwood, an employee of the Kerr-McGee nuclear plant in Oklahoma who died in 1974 amidst mysterious circumstances. Silkwood had been investigating compromises in the plant's safety standards surreptitiously and whilst driving to meet a *New York Times* reporter, allegedly with documentary evidence, she was involved in a fatal car crash (the documentary evidence was not found at the scene of her death). Kerr-McGee and Silkwood's estate remained mired in legal challenges throughout the 1970s, thus prohibiting Fonda's attempts at dramatisation.³¹ The IPC nuclear project was in deadlock for only a brief period, though, as in 1977 Roz Heller, a Vice President at Columbia, suggested amalgamating a similarly themed idea that Michael Douglas had concurrently been developing with his production company.³² Douglas's venture began as a polemical, anti-nuclear narrative before assuming the commercial hallmarks of an IPC film. Mike Gray, who had previously produced and shot a documentary about the Black Panthers entitled *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (1971), authored the original screenplay of *The China Syndrome*. Gray approached Douglas with the script during 1976; Douglas, who had just been awarded the Best Picture Oscar for producing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), initially declined the script but reversed his judgement given the story's portrayal of a 'company man' involved in an ethical crisis. He claimed in 1979 that the original idea for his version of *The China Syndrome* had interested him more on a moral than a political level: 'I thought it was a wonderful character study of a man against a machine. I like pictures about average guy heroes who aren't stronger or smarter than anyone else but who

³¹ Gregg, Kilday, 'Plotting Nuclear' *Los Angeles Times* (5 September 1977), p. 4.

³² Fonda, *My Life so Far*, p. 376.

make moral decisions and risk their lives.’³³ Although not necessarily Douglas’s intention, this description of the central dilemma faced by the film’s main character, Jack Godell (Jack Lemmon), echoed the story of Karen Silkwood.

Doubts surrounding the circumstances of Silkwood’s death were as much (if not more) part of her legacy as her campaigning when she was alive. While not officially chronicled by *The China Syndrome*, the Silkwood case permeated the narrative structure and generic disposition of the film. Indeed, a surge of conspiracy style narratives pitting individuals against various corrupt elites abounded in Hollywood during the years leading up to *The China Syndrome*’s release. These included *Three Days of the Condor* (1975, depicting a CIA conspiracy), *All the President’s Men* (1976, Watergate), *Capricorn One* (1978, NASA conspiracy), and *Coma* (1978, medical conspiracy); conspiracy thrillers thus provided solid returns at the box office. The narrative formulae of these films echoed Kiernan’s notion of audience politicisation yet fusing Silkwood’s case with Fonda’s political identity set *The China Syndrome* apart. These factors combined suggested *The China Syndrome*’s portrait of corporate greed within the nuclear power industry would perform well commercially, which it did proceed to do.³⁴

The China Syndrome overlapped with a high incidence of anti-nuclear activism in the United States and its near meltdown scenario attracted endorsement from grassroots protestors and sceptical scientists alike. The coinciding nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, which occurred twelve days after the film’s release, not

³³ Michael Douglas quoted in Aljean Harmetz, ‘Fallout from *China Syndrome* Has Already Begun’ *New York Times* (11 March 1979), pp. D1, D19.

³⁴ The film procured the biggest non-holiday weekend gross in Columbia’s history. Author uncredited, ‘*China Syndrome*, 3 Days in 534, at \$4,354,854’ *Variety* (21 March 1979), *The China Syndrome* microfiche, AMPAS.

only enhanced *The China Syndrome*'s box office revenue, but also its perceived credibility as a critique of nuclear power.³⁵ The sense of 'reality' imparted by *The China Syndrome* therefore became part of its appeal, serving both its commercial and political function within the IPC framework. There remains a temptation in this regard to dismiss *Nine to Five* as a frivolous attempt at politically inspired cinema given the ostensible 'weightiness' of *The China Syndrome*. As cinematic ventures with a measured balance of political and commercial elements, however, *Nine to Five* and *The China Syndrome* proved the versatility of the IPC approach to filmmaking and should be considered parts of a greater whole within Fonda's career, rather than rival attempts at political 'sophistication'. The box office success both films enjoyed indicated that at least half of the IPC brief had ultimately been met – playing to a mass audience.³⁶ Assessing the company's more complex attempts of 'audience politicisation' requires an altogether more interpretative approach.

***The China Syndrome* and Three Mile Island**

The protracted journey of *Coming Home* from script to screen attracted media interest upon its release in 1978 and this, in turn, provided advance exposure for *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* as 'future' projects of IPC. When each film generated reportage in its own right, this tended to focus on the political topic addressed and its place within Fonda's contemporaneous activism. Indeed, the fusion of her politics and filmmaking sometimes became discernible within newspaper headlines alone, negating the need to have a working knowledge of Fonda's activism in order to

³⁵ The impact of the film/accident coincidence is discussed in the following section.

³⁶ *The China Syndrome* made \$26.1 million in rentals and *Nine to Five* secured more than double again, with \$57.9 million. Source: Finler, *The Hollywood Story*, p. 278.

‘know’ that she occupied both the cinematic and political realms of the nation.³⁷ Such a merger is in some ways extraordinary, given that Fonda was then Hollywood’s most bankable actress and could still maintain associations with contentious political topics. Yet this apparent symbiosis between politics and stardom was also transient, and the period of 1979 to 1980 represented its apex. In accounting for this dual media presence, which in many ways reflected the strategic model of IPC, a crucial episode stands apart – the reception of *The China Syndrome* in the wake of the accident at Three Mile Island.

On 28th March 1979, reports of a major accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania became headline news and the events eerily echoed incidents depicted in *The China Syndrome*. The Three Mile Island crisis began with a turbine trip and loss of coolant in the second reactor’s core, and subsequently magnified through a series of human and mechanical errors, some of which remain unexplained.³⁸ As the crisis escalated, plant officials attempted to assuage the general public and surrounding community but frequently offered opaque and contradictory reassurances. On a national level, anti-nuclear activism had steadily gathered momentum leading up to Three Mile Island and surged amongst the general populace after the accident.³⁹

The China Syndrome had hitherto garnered a sizable amount of media attention because it was considered to be an ‘authentic’ vision of a nuclear energy milieu. A line of discussion in the *New York Times* in advance of the accident focused

³⁷ A quintessential example is Joan Sweeney, ‘Secretaries Joined by Jane Fonda, Meet to Demand More Pay, Respect and Rights’, *Los Angeles Times* (24 April 1980), p. 4.

³⁸ J. Samuel Walker, *Three Mile Island: A Nuclear Crisis in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 72-78.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 239-244.

on the film's legitimacy, which involved debating its accuracy among nuclear experts. Pundits for and against nuclear power agreed that the film had been released at a critical point for the industry but differed on the plausibility of the accidents depicted.⁴⁰ This highlighted part of the IPC strategy, namely to present political topics in recognisable situations, and each film's verisimilitude was achieved in different ways. *Nine to Five* was enhanced by Gilbert and Fonda's research interviews with members of Working Women, giving the script its empirical edge.⁴¹ This approach, in turn, led to the *New York Times* reporting a grassroots appreciation of the movie, noting: 'secretaries are the ones who laugh loudest at *Nine to Five*.'⁴² The verisimilitude of *The China Syndrome* was instead predicated on the basis of its technical accuracy, a feat attributable to the procurement of George Jenkins as the film's production designer.⁴³ Aside from its visual authenticity, initial drafts of the screenplay had also drawn heavily on factual events, incorporating references to nuclear accidents that occurred throughout the United States during the 1970s.⁴⁴ Screenwriter Mike Gray's original principal characters, a trio of documentary filmmakers, explicitly referred to a 1970 incident at the Dresden II nuclear plant near Chicago (involving a stuck water gauge) and a major fire which broke out at the Brown's Ferry nuclear plant, Tennessee, in 1975.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ David Burnham, 'Nuclear Experts Debate *The China Syndrome*' *New York Times* (18 March 1979), pp. D1, D19.

⁴¹ 'Jane Fonda: Getting Into Character' and 'Bruce Gilbert: How IPC Makes Movies' in 'Production Notes', *Nine to Five* microfiche, AMPAS.

⁴² Georgia Dullea, 'Secretaries See Parallels in *Nine to Five*', *New York Times* (2 January 1981), p. A14.

⁴³ Jenkins, who won an Academy Award for *All the President's Men*, designed Ventana's control room with a scale and detail equivalent to his realisation of the Washington Post newsroom.

⁴⁴ Mike Gray and T.S. Cook, *The China Syndrome*, 2nd draft screenplay (20 December 1976), AMPAS. T.S. Cook was brought in to 'polish' the screenplay after Douglas optioned Gray's script.

⁴⁵ In the film's final cut, the Dresden II incident remained, although dramatised within the plot and thus not explicitly cited. The loss of coolant resulting from the fire at Brown's Ferry is also implicitly featured in one of the film's later sequences.

Laden with technical jargon in an effort to strike a chord of authenticity, the early drafts of *The China Syndrome* nevertheless lacked complex characterisations, and included a weak female role. A key feature of Fonda's subsequent impact on the evolution of the movie was the need to rewrite the main protagonist as a female reporter. Kimberly Wells, in the released version of the film, craves a career notable for this era: that of investigative journalist. Her rookie reporter functions as a distant cousin of Woodward and Bernstein (committed to celluloid three years earlier in *All The President's Men*) as she exposes the monolithic corruption pervading the nuclear industry. Kimberly's incidental discoveries are vital to her wide-eyed appeal, since she doesn't plan to attack the corporate elite from the outset. *The China Syndrome* thus demonstrated both visual and factual verisimilitude, and depicted a central character of liberal-heroic proportions. This combination offers a basic framework for assessing how *The China Syndrome* politicised its audiences in the wake of Three Mile Island.

Inevitable comparisons were made between the film and the accident in American newspapers. Specifically, accounts of cinema-goers who had attended screenings of *The China Syndrome* in order to 'understand' Three Mile Island included people living close to the facility. In an article entitled 'Movie Strikes Close to Home', *Los Angeles Times* journalist Charles Schreger interviewed stunned local residents, one of whom, Joe Buela, stated: 'I just want to find out as much about it as I can. [...] Your town makes the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*; you want to find out why.'⁴⁶ A second Harrisburg interviewee, Noel Drayer, went further, claiming: 'if I had seen [*The China Syndrome*] before the accident, my wife and I would have

⁴⁶ Joe Buela, a Harrisburg resident, quoted in Charles Schreger, 'Movie Strikes Close to Home' *Los Angeles Times* (6 April 1979), *The China Syndrome* microfiche, AMPAS.

packed up and left. I don't know if we would ever come back again.'⁴⁷ By making the public aware of the 'problem' before the crisis, *The China Syndrome* was received as directly related to the events of Three Mile Island, and, in turn, had implications for the political dimension of those events. William Cologie of Three Mile Island Alert, a prominent anti-nuclear activist group based in Harrisburg, claims that the film functioned as propaganda for grassroots activism, a phenomenon magnified in the context of the accident.⁴⁸ The dramatic scenario of *The China Syndrome* therefore functioned as a substitute source of technical information for some during the critical first days of the crisis when Metropolitan Edison, who owned Three Mile Island, offered mild and contradictory reassurances. In this regard, the reception of the film blurred the boundaries of fiction and fact.

Media coverage of *The China Syndrome* reached a surreal and unconventional apex when the film was referred to in television news coverage of Three Mile Island. A CBS newscast conveyed the distinction made by the facility's spokesmen between the film title's hypothetical scenario (the 'China Syndrome' refers to a meltdown of the reactor core, theoretically 'all the way to China') with the reality of the event: 'Plant officials said today's accident was not a 'China Syndrome' situation, referring to the current movie about a near-catastrophic nuclear meltdown,' stated Walter Cronkite.⁴⁹ At a Nuclear Regulatory Commission hearing broadcast on the *NBC Nightly News* of 29 March, a tense exchange between Joseph Hendrie, then chairman of the NRC, and Oregon congressman James Weaver (Democrat), demonstrated the use of the term at the level of national politics:

⁴⁷ Noel Drayer quoted in Schreger, 'Close to Home', *The China Syndrome* microfiche, AMPAS.

⁴⁸ E-mail correspondence between author and William Cologie, Vice Chair of Three Mile Island Alert planning council (24 July 2006).

⁴⁹ *CBS Evening News* (28 March 1979), Vanderbilt Television News Archive, Nashville, Tennessee [hereafter VTVNA].

Weaver: How close did we come to a core meltdown, to a 'China Syndrome'?

Hendrie: Nowhere near it.

Weaver: Could it have happened?

Hendrie: I don't think so, I think we were nowhere near it.

Weaver: I, I think this is a very dangerous situation, and I'm extremely concerned that we get to the bottom of this.⁵⁰

NBC's most sensational segment, however, featured a silhouetted interview with a nuclear power plant maintenance specialist, who alleged Three Mile Island had the worst safety conditions and stated he would not be returning to the plant. Although this specialist's concerns were reasonable in their own right, his 'role' significantly mirrored that of *The China Syndrome*'s doomed hero, Jack Godell, and in a wider sense, Karen Silkwood.

The China Syndrome was mentioned almost daily in the context of Three Mile Island on America's three major news networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), often as the lead story. Hollywood's trade magazines noted news programmes were giving the film free airtime by using excerpts from the film's teaser trailer campaign.⁵¹ NBC's coverage was a case in point, with a report by Andrea Mitchell using film clips within the broader context of national protest over nuclear power.⁵² Beginning with footage of a 1978 activist campaign to halt the construction of a nuclear plant at Seabrook, New Hampshire, Mitchell's report also included aerial shots of an inactive

⁵⁰ *NBC Nightly News* (29 March 1979), VTVNA.

⁵¹ Dale Pollock, 'China Syndrome, with an Unanticipated Pub Boost, Coins \$18 Mil at the B.O.' *Variety* (3 April 1979), *The China Syndrome* microfiche, MHL.

⁵² *NBC Nightly News* (1 April 1979), VTVNA.

Pennsylvania plant, one of five closed down by the NRC in March 1979.⁵³ Also, images of Karen Silkwood segued into clips from *The China Syndrome*, suggesting that the film was a logical outgrowth of the anti-nuclear movement preceding it. Narrating over this juxtaposition, Mitchell's report informed viewers:

Silkwood was an employee at an Oklahoma plant who died in an automobile accident under mysterious circumstances. When the accident occurred, she was about to reveal alleged safety violations of the plant. And a new movie, *The China Syndrome*, spread the word about nuclear disaster to people who might not have known about a meltdown, much less worry about one.⁵⁴

The suture of Silkwood's case and *The China Syndrome* was temporally misleading, given the five-year gap between the nuclear worker's death and the film's release. As political montage, however, this reporting implied that *The China Syndrome* functioned as the whistle-blowing legacy of Silkwood's alleged discoveries. Notably, Fonda (who, of course, had sought to dramatise Silkwood's story) was shown in the film's control room, forging a visual political link between the two women. Outlining the contemporaneous anti-nuclear movement represented the thrust of Mitchell's report, and the arrival of *The China Syndrome* ahead of the Three Mile Island crisis was argued to be the death knell for the nuclear industry.

The China Syndrome impacted on the anti-nuclear movement at both a national and local level. Cinemas in Harrisburg ran late shows of the film 'due to

⁵³ Mitchell's report declines to mention that the Seabrook, NH, protest was unsuccessful.

⁵⁴ *NBC Nightly News* (1 April 1979), VTVNA.

popular demand' compounding the attention it had received before the accident.⁵⁵ When the crisis had taken hold, moreover, the film was perceived as technical instruction by Harrisburg residents who felt the Three Mile Island owning utility company was starving them of information.⁵⁶ This point is maintained by William Cologie, of anti-nuclear activist group Three Mile Island Alert [TMIA]. *The China Syndrome* was considered a 'must-see' film in Harrisburg after Three Mile Island having been stimulated by word-of-mouth interest, and also represented a more 'comprehensible' account of the accident than that of the reporters covering it, since they were unfamiliar with basic plant operations and the effects of radiation.⁵⁷ In turn, the membership of organisations like TMIA surged after the release of the film and ensuing nuclear crisis. This was part of a wider regional phenomenon, whereas membership of anti-nuclear groups surrounding the Harrisburg area also increased significantly during this period.⁵⁸

Interest in the anti-nuclear position grew in line with that of local politics. The Clamshell Alliance, an activist group that had attempted to block the construction of the Seabrook, NH, nuclear plant, reported unprecedented attention in its activities. Their efforts had featured in the national news and thus received major exposure. A surge of new business for the alliance had also been generated by stories involving Metropolitan Edison and, significantly, Jane Fonda, forcing its offices to answer requests with form letters.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Walker, *Three Mile Island*, p. 121.

⁵⁶ Lloyd Shearer, 'Why is Jane Fonda Hollywood's Angry Woman?', *Parade* (16 December 1979), p. 4.

⁵⁷ E-mail correspondence between author and William Cologie, Vice Chair of Three Mile Island Alert Planning Council (24 July 2006).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Samuel McCracken, 'The Harrisburg Syndrome', *Commentary* (June 1979) p. 39.

The China Syndrome represented an appropriate parting shot to a decade that witnessed a generic cycle of conspiracy films and the Watergate scandal. Indeed, the film functions as a belated anti-Nixonian statement in Fonda's oeuvre. Nixon had been committed to nuclear expansion; moreover, Nixon was then a byword for conspiracy. Along with *Klute*, *The China Syndrome* bookended Fonda's cinematic decade; both films had suit-clad villains occupying towering corporate spaces with negative associations. Although differences abound between Bree Daniel and Kimberly Wells, the resurgence of a cutting edge political agenda in Fonda's public persona on the eve of Three Mile Island was observed as a return to her activism of the early-1970s, with nuclear power as a signature issue. Reportage in the *New York Times* profiled her warnings of the proposed merger between General Electric and Cox broadcasting,⁶⁰ an alarming nexus between the nuclear and television industries dramatised in the film itself. In a bolder move, Fonda attended press conferences with Tom Hayden and urged President Carter to dismiss Energy Secretary James Schlesinger, Jr.⁶¹ The success of *The China Syndrome* had given Fonda the legitimate mainstream platform from which to make far-reaching political statements. IPC was in its ascendancy.

Conclusion: Reformulating IPC Films

Subtle changes in the agenda of IPC revealed shifts in Fonda's public political identity. The politicised reception of *The China Syndrome* had set an impossible benchmark for *Nine to Five* to emulate. Having adopted a crowd-friendly format, highbrow critics were unsympathetic to the film's attempts at raising awareness of its

⁶⁰ Tom Buckley, 'Fonda Tilts Forces of Nuclear Energy in *China Syndrome*', *New York Times* (16 March 1979), p. C6.

⁶¹ Aljean Harmetz, 'When Nuclear Crisis Imitates a Film', *New York Times* (4 April 1979) p. C18.

chosen political topic. David Denby, in his review for *New York* magazine, dismissed *Nine to Five* as ‘a witless mess, a nastier *I Love Lucy*. The filmmakers treat us like stupid children, yet I know that some people will hail this nonsensical picture as an advance for women.’⁶² Stanley Kauffman, a supporter of Fonda’s early career, took an opportunity to level criticism at her broader body of issue based cinema, stating in *New Republic*:

[*Nine to Five*] has one resemblance to *Coming Home*. Jane Fonda is in both of them and gave the impression before each that a serious subject was to be treated seriously: in the earlier picture, Vietnam; in this picture, the male exploitation, sexual and otherwise, of female employees and co-workers in business. Both films fizzled. *Nine to Five* is [...] an old style exploitation flick, exploiting another hot topic.⁶³

In a similar vein, Vincent Canby’s *New York Times* notice suggested the vision presented by *Nine to Five* lacked grounding in an economic reality: ‘Forget the energy crisis, inflation, recession [...] there’s no problem with capitalism that three liberated Nancy Drews can’t solve if they don’t have to keep running out to get coffee for their superiors.’⁶⁴ The most politically grounded review, however, was penned by Robert Asahina for the liberal New York periodical *New Leader*, which claimed *Nine to Five* had ‘as little to do with feminism as it does with comedy. [...] The film is a peculiar combination of slapstick and ideology-mongering.’⁶⁵ Moreover, Asahina railed against the film winning the approval of *Ms.* magazine by asserting: ‘Feminists should

⁶² David Denby, ‘Blissed Out’, *New York* (22 December 1980), p. 62.

⁶³ Stanley Kauffmann, ‘Old But New, New But Old’, *New Republic* (31 January 1981), p. 21.

⁶⁴ Vincent Canby, ‘*Nine to Five*, Office Comedy’, *New York Times* (19 December 1980), p. C20.

⁶⁵ Robert Asahina, ‘Secretaries and Earthlings’, *New Leader* (29 December 1980), p. 17.

be appalled by this odious and obnoxious comedy,' and noted witheringly, 'Fonda's reputation as an empty-headed activist is sadly borne out here.'⁶⁶ Asahina's parting shot, however, is actually the most intuitive given the fiscal and ideological balancing act IPC had chosen to undertake: 'One is left to presume that what started out as satire degenerated into slapstick for perceived commercial reasons.'⁶⁷ While grounded in cynicism, this comment foreshadowed the extraordinary box office *Nine to Five* would subsequently enjoy.

Given the calculated aims of *Nine to Five* in seeking grassroots appeal, it is little wonder that critics gave the film short shrift. Critics rarely assess comedies for anything other than their entertainment value and, similarly, comedies seldom contest the highest accolades the industry has to offer. Rather, *Nine to Five* received positive press coverage in articles rather than reviews and the focus on Fonda's original inspiration for the film, Karen Nussbaum, indicated that the film had maintained connections with its political source. Moreover, both Nussbaum's organisation and Los Angeles based unions reported a surge in interest in the wake of the film's release.⁶⁸ Nussbaum was also the subject of a biographical article in the *New York Times*, which detailed the origins of Working Women and the organisation's aims for the future.⁶⁹ Though by no means on the scale of the press generated by *The China Syndrome*, Nussbaum's exposure nevertheless indicated that the issues Working Women campaigned on had rebounded into the public domain with the 'real' leaders, such as Nussbaum, in tow. In this sense, *Nine to Five* had completed its commercial-political brief in far less sensational fashion than *The China Syndrome*, which had, of

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bernstein, 'Nine to Five Sparks Interest', *Los Angeles Times* (6 March 1981), p. 3.

⁶⁹ Shabecoff, 'Nine-to-Five Woman', p. F8.

course, become bound to a single event rather than functioning as a wider critique of corporate power structures. Both films merged into the headlines of the political issues they had set out to address, reflecting Fonda's embrace of a commercial-political approach to stardom.

The favourable commercial fortunes of IPC Films outwardly mirrored Fonda's recuperating popular image during the transition years of the late-1970s and early-1980s. Indeed, as one decade gave way to another, the marketability of liberal political filmmaking was reaffirmed as a viable force at the American box office, exemplified by *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five*. The resurgence of Fonda's popularity in this context provides a way of understanding how 'the '70s' became 'the '80s', not just in a cinematic sense but also in assessing political and cultural changes. This point derives from two phenomena. Firstly, there is a tendency in popular historical and journalistic writing for decades to be discussed as discrete and sometimes oppositional eras, particularly when this writing is retrospective or nostalgic. Accounts of the twentieth century exhibit this tendency in manifold ways, especially in relation to certain 'neighbouring' decades. America in the 1950s evokes very different associations to America in the 1960s, for example, yet part of the historian's task must be to function as a nexus for such eras – to identify continuities as well as exposing contradictions. Secondly, and more specifically, popular accounts of Fonda's image and career at this point in American history developed relatively firm associations with epochal shifts in the nation's political and cultural arenas. This was demonstrated through reportage demarcating her image changes using decades, such as the '60s sex symbol to '70s activist transition discussed in chapter 1. It is therefore useful to consider *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* in tandem while

remaining aware of these tendencies towards decade categorisation, given that one was released in the 1970s and the other in the 1980s. In their totality, these films offer ways of deciphering Fonda's evolving star image within the context of America's conservative cultural and political shift at the end of the 1970s because of their pragmatic foundations. They represent her in a variety of guises yet can be united by identifying the manufactured identity motif that Fonda came to embody. IPC presented narratives of political change and revealed Fonda's entrepreneurial self-awareness of her own propensity for such change.

Modifications in the commercial and political composition of IPC were discernible through exposure the company received in books and media of this period. Comparing sources published before and after IPC's box office successes reveals this in relation to Fonda's star image. For example, an early, concise description of the company's aims was conveyed in a chapter on Fonda written by David Talbot and Barbara Zheutlin as part of their 1978 book, *Creative Differences*. A principally sympathetic profile, Talbot and Zheutlin reported that 'Fonda's determined effort to make progressive Hollywood features is part of a general strategy to influence U.S. culture and politics'.⁷⁰ These ambitious plans, which were arguably realised, coincided with Tom Hayden's own desire to reform 'the system', Talbot and Zheutlin noted, as evidenced by his (unsuccessful) 1976 race for the U.S. Senate. Peter Krämer has observed that Fonda's films and Hayden's politics more than simply coincided; indeed, he states that *The China Syndrome* and *Nine to Five* were tailored to address specific points on Hayden's CED agenda.⁷¹ While this is largely true, it is important to note that after IPC had proven its box office credentials in the early-1980s, explicit

⁷⁰ Talbot and Zheutlin, *Creative Differences*, p. 138.

⁷¹ Krämer, 'When "Hanoi Jane" Conquered Hollywood', pp. 108-109.

references to overlaps in the CED and IPC agendas all but disappeared. In the wake of its successes, media profiles of IPC instead applauded its ability to generate a profit whilst using liberal storylines, raising doubt over whether audiences remained the locus for ‘politicisation’, or had become simply a source of political revenue for CED. The titles of the articles in question encapsulated much of this uncertainty. ‘Jane Fonda Banking on Message Movies’, headlined *American Film* in November 1981, and four months later the *New York Times* proclaimed ‘Jane Fonda: She Makes Ideas Pay at Box Office’.⁷² Both the commercial and political elements of IPC were discernible within these headlines but the balance had shifted toward favouring Fonda’s entrepreneurial savoir-faire rather than her desire to raise consciousness on a mass scale. Published between these articles was *New York* magazine’s December 1981 profile of IPC, which declared Fonda and Gilbert had sent Hollywood ‘the kind of message it understands best – that espousing causes can earn big bucks, even when the orientation is leftist’.⁷³ While these articles were written on the eve of the company’s first commercial failure (*Rollover*), the IPC synthesis of politics and commercial form had, for better or worse, proven its appeal for mainstream America.

⁷² Mike Bygrave and Joan Goodman, ‘Jane Fonda Banking on Message Movies’, *American Film* (November 1981), pp. 38-42; Harmetz, ‘She Makes Ideas Pay’, p. C17.

⁷³ William Wolf, ‘Principles and Profits’, *New York* (14 December 1981), p. 90.

Chapter Five

Politicising Genre: Jane Fonda and Alan J. Pakula

‘Any new movie that takes chances within certain genres is taking a bigger risk with today’s audiences.’

Richard Corliss, ‘Western Anagram’,
New Times (13 November 1978), p. 77.

‘When a fervent feminist teams up with the man who directed *All the President’s Men*, it figures that there is something more political afoot than the traditional stampedes and saloon shootouts.’

Guy Flatley, ‘The Man Who Made *Klute* Directs Jane Fonda as a Rancher’, *New York Times* (3 June 1977), p. 26.

‘An advocate of solar energy, she noted it’s troubling to her that oil-producing nations can hold the world hostage with their oil, not to mention what they can do to the economy by manipulating their financial billions. Carrying these concepts to an extreme is the basis of *Rollover*.’

Mike Kalina, ‘Father, Films, Fate on Fonda’s Mind’,
Pittsburgh-Post Gazette (7 December 1981), p. 11.

Introduction

The tendency, or even the desire, to attribute films to (typically) one individual is demonstrated in all levels of writing about cinema. Analyses of a director's oeuvre or a star's performance can, even when discussed in multiple contexts ranging from scholarship to film journalism, often eschew the antagonistic dimensions of filmmaking. As previous chapters have asserted, the influence Fonda exerted over her films was attributable to the political values of her stardom and how these related to the creative and industrial impact she had as an actress-producer, which relied largely on intervention. Fonda thus created political meaning for her films through a process of negotiation. Accordingly, the three films Fonda made with liberal director Alan Pakula between 1971 and 1981 are important because they offer an opportunity to assess a protracted and affirmative collaboration cultivated during a volatile decade for both Fonda and America. Furthermore, the films Fonda made with Pakula temporally encompassed the output of IPC as well as forming one of its later projects: ten years after *Klute* (1971) crystallised Fonda's drive for social and sexual autonomy, Pakula directed her for the third and final time in *Rollover* (1981); an economic conspiracy thriller, *Rollover* was the last cinematic project IPC realised in its line of commercial-political Hollywood films.¹

Klute remained Fonda and Pakula's most successful collaborative project both critically and commercially, after which they made the 1940s Western, *Comes a Horseman* (1978) and *Rollover*, each of which were box office failures.² This

¹ *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond*, an ostensibly apolitical IPC production, received parallel releases in 1981. The implications of IPC releasing such contrasting films is discussed at the close of this chapter.

² In *Comes a Horseman*, set in Montana during the closing months of World War II, Fonda plays Ella Connors, an independent rancher thwarting the expansionist ambitions of land baron J.W. Ewing (Jason

downward trend over the course of the 1970s is counter-intuitive given the otherwise burgeoning careers both figures enjoyed through the later years of the decade, which will be outlined in the next section. While *Klute* stands apart as the more celebrated and studied work, Fonda and Pakula's three films can nonetheless be productively linked using historical and theoretical approaches. Their collaborations exhibited thematic continuities and explored these through a revisionist use of genre, employing recognisable conventions of film *noir*, the Western, and the conspiracy thriller. *Klute*, *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* signified themselves as 'disruptive' versions of these genres respectively through conspicuous allusions to pervasive power structures (patriarchy; post-war capitalism; global elites). Considered in conjunction with her politicised stardom, Fonda's 'generic trilogy' with Alan Pakula highlighted tensions not only within her star image but also in the cultivation of progressive, profitable cinema through Hollywood's commercial forms. Singling out Fonda's work with Pakula thus warrants scrutiny as an overlooked dimension of Fonda's variable fortunes as a commercial-political star.

This chapter is structured both thematically and chronologically. *Klute* is positioned as a landmark work for both director and star, and thus constitutes a logical departure point from which to embark on analyses of their subsequent films. *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* are discussed, in turn, using a combination of unpublished production documents and contemporaneous reception sources. The films are located as products of the director/star combination, and also as contributions to their wider genre, thereby acknowledging the implications of incorporating a liberal agenda into a

Robards). Both Connors and Ewing, however, are each the target of a company speculating for oil on their land. *Rollover*, set in the contemporaneous world of high finance, depicts Lee Winters' (Fonda) struggle to protect the interests of her inherited petrochemical empire after she uncovers an international, Arab-led fiscal conspiracy.

generic framework. *Rollover*'s status as not only Fonda and Pakula's final project but, crucially, the only IPC box office failure is also accorded extra-textual focus: it serves as a barometer for the ongoing 'legitimacy' of Fonda's cine-political identity into the 1980s.

Fonda, Pakula, and the 1970s

The industrial standing and cultural presence of Fonda and Pakula during this period of Hollywood history suggests that 'neglected' films such as *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* can, and indeed should, be discussed in greater detail despite being overshadowed by the various interests *Klute* has attracted. Peter Krämer's article on this phase of Fonda's career discounts these two films as anomalous due to their commercial shortcomings, two 'blips' in an otherwise extraordinary run of hits between 1977 and 1981. He does, however, nominally link *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* together thematically, along with *The China Syndrome*, *Nine to Five*, *Fun with Dick and Jane* and *The Electric Horseman* (1979), as critical portraits of corporate power.³ Locating these two films in Pakula's career has proven even more of an enigma for film historians. Jared Brown's biography of the director discusses *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* (along with his 1979 comedy, *Starting Over*) in a chapter vaguely entitled 'A Mixed Bag'.⁴ While Brown's imprecision denotes that Pakula cannot easily be classified as an *auteur*, he is otherwise at pains to affirm the influence Pakula had in coaching Oscar winning performances from Meryl Streep (*Sophie's Choice* [1982]), Jason Robards (*All the President's Men* [1976]) and, of

³ Krämer, 'When "Hanoi Jane" Conquered Hollywood', pp. 106-108.

⁴ Jared Brown, *Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2005), pp. 203-222.

course, Fonda (*Klute*).⁵ Indeed, Brown adopts an auteurist line of argument when he identifies a ‘unifying factor’ in Pakula’s work, namely ‘the attempt to examine his characters with the utmost psychological complexity, and, in many cases, the hope to create a more just society, generally by probing the weaknesses of America’s system of government and its most powerful institutions’.⁶ This observation not only contextualises the striking visual and thematic strategies Pakula became renowned for but also suggests he sympathised with the political aims of IPC Films.

All the President’s Men subsumed political content into commercial form in a manner anticipating the *modus operandi* of IPC. Indeed, Pakula’s film about Watergate courted and cultivated popular opinion regarding the principal domestic event of the 1970s just as *Coming Home* reignited debate over the divisions of the Vietnam War. While Fonda and Pakula tackled their subjects discretely, these films can nevertheless be linked as part of a wider cultural and political inquiry: *All the President’s Men* and *Coming Home* were high profile visions of recent American history that garnered significant exposure and reward.⁷ Moreover, these films demonstrated the commercial viability of their liberal political content. *All the President’s Men* received multiple nominations from the Academy, winning four of its eight nominations, and performed significantly well at the American box office.⁸ By 1981, the year *Rollover* was released, Fonda’s stardom had reached unprecedented heights, thanks to a plethora of hit movies – three of these realised by IPC Films. She

⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁶ Ibid. Brown positions *Klute* and *Sophie’s Choice* as ‘psychological’ films and in the ‘social’ category lists *The Parallax View* (1974), *All the President’s Men*, *Rollover*, *Presumed Innocent* (1990), and *The Pelican Brief* (1993).

⁷ *All the President’s Men* and *Coming Home* were both nominated for the Best Picture Oscar of their respective years and each lost out to a more ‘conservative’ rival (*Rocky* [1976]; *The Deer Hunter* [1978]).

⁸ *Starting Over*, while not a political picture, did fare well commercially and garnered Academy Award nominations for Jill Clayburgh and Candice Bergen.

had garnered numerous acting accolades, including Academy Awards for *Klute* and *Coming Home*. From this perspective, reuniting Fonda and Pakula for their second and third films ostensibly made creative and commercial sense. The subsequent foundering of *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* thus raises questions over why Fonda and Pakula's collaboration failed to reignite critical or mainstream interest, given both the established success of *Klute* and more broadly the cine-political reputations each figure had hitherto attained. In this regard, the success of *Klute* became an elusive, unrepeatable benchmark.

Klute

Film *noir* underwent a period of revival and revision in Hollywood during the 1970s. *Auteur* led works such as Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973), Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) and Arthur Penn's *Night Moves* (1975) are examples used by David Cook in *Lost Illusions*, his book discussing this period of American filmmaking.⁹ Cook suggests that the resurgence of genre films signalled an opportunity for contemporaneous *auteurs* to make their artistic mark on these forms. Furthermore, he identifies genre films were attractive ventures for studios during a financially challenging period for the industry given that they could be packaged for audiences as 'familiar' commodities.¹⁰

Klute sits uneasily as a purely *auteurist* treatment of *noir* because in 1971 Pakula's 'authorship' was largely unknown and, as discussed, has never quite exhibited the dimensions of a consistent body of work over time. As a genre film,

⁹ Cook, *Lost Illusions*, p. 189.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

though, *Klute* was notably revisionist, relegating the film's private detective namesake to the sidelines and instead focusing on the interiority of Fonda's call girl/actress protagonist, Bree Daniel. Bree's attempt to maintain her social and sexual autonomy is intimately explored through scenes depicting the character's psychiatric sessions and these, in turn, contextualise her descent into the perilous underworld of the film. Generic devices of cinematic suspense are thus fused with the film's distinctly 'contemporary' embrace of women's consciousness; the combination functions as both a formal and thematic means of engagement. As Steve Neale has noted in his seminal work, *Genre*:

[T]here is an acknowledgement that genres and their meanings have an active role and a social effectivity of their own, to the extent that they function actively as components within the construction of socio-historical reality, rather than simply as reflections of it. They are determining factors, not simply determined ones.¹¹

In this regard, a genre's significance is inscribed according to varied factors, including the historical specificities of its socio-cultural context. As a revisionist example of early-1970s film *noir*, *Klute* 'looked back' at its generic heritage, whilst also providing a means of engaging sexual politics 'head-on' by infusing this traditionally male genre with an apparently 'feminist' bias.

¹¹ Stephen Neale, *Genre* (London: BFI, 1980), p. 16.

The feminist credentials of *Klute* are a matter of ongoing debate amongst film scholars.¹² It is not the purpose of this chapter to intervene in this debate but rather, in the first instance, to identify the anomalous significance of centralising the female character of this film *noir* during a key historical period for feminism. Privileging Bree's interior life in *Klute* was executed in spite of the *noir* genre rather than because of it, and did so without forcing a conspicuous breach between the film and its genre. As such, *Klute* set in motion many of the patterns, devices and issues by which *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* can be critically evaluated as 'generic experiments' within the Fonda-Pakula partnership. The most preponderant of these is the interplay of authorship and genre.

An eagerness to designate the significance of a film can create artificial categorisations that obscure the inherently collaborative nature of shared filmic ventures, and, to a large extent, *Klute* has hitherto reflected this syndrome. It can originate in patterns of the film's critical reception: '*Klute* is Jane Fonda's film', wrote Bridget Byrne in her review for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, '[h]er performance has a lot to say about the why's and wherefores of women's lib, about human cruelty, about our willingness to submit to senseless violence, about the abuse humanity inflicts upon itself. [...] It is the most honest film about sexual need and prostitution I have seen.'¹³ Likewise, Charles Champlin's review in the *Los Angeles Times* proclaimed: 'Miss Fonda creates a character who is hardly less a comment on

¹² Examples include Diane Giddis, 'The Divided Woman: Bree Daniels in *Klute*', *Women and Film*, nos. 3-4, (1973), reproduced in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods: Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 194-201; Christine Gledhill, '*Klute* 1: A Contemporary Film Noir and Feminist Criticism', and '*Klute* 2: Feminism and *Klute*', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Women in Film Noir* (London: BFI, 1978), pp. 6-21, 112-128; Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

¹³ Bridget Byrne, '*Klute*: Superb Fonda Picture', *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (24 June 1971) in 'Clippings (USA)', file 246, box 34. Alan J. Pakula papers, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, USA [hereafter AJP/AMPAS].

the culture of her time than the [*They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*] marathon dancer was but who is a fully realized individual human being whose truths seem to emerge from deep within herself instead of sitting on the surface like makeup.’¹⁴ For some reviewers, the ‘failure’ of *Klute* to reach the benchmark of its generic predecessors threw the issue of Fonda/Bree’s characterisation into sharper focus. Richard Schickel’s review in *Life* magazine opined ‘though it thus resembles a genre crime piece, the film succeeds less in this respect. [...] As a result the movie must stand or fall as a study in character – specifically that of Miss Fonda’s call girl.’¹⁵ As a vehicle for social commentary, Schickel thus considered Fonda’s Bree the principal bearer of meaning in *Klute*: ‘I think the movie has a great deal to say about the emptiness of our allegedly “swinging” sexuality and the true pornography of our culture, which has almost nothing to do with dirty pictures and bad language and everything to do with a spiritual malaise that we have barely begun to define.’¹⁶ The most pressing element of Schickel’s review, though, was his depiction of *Klute* as a shrine to Fonda’s talent:

It seems to me unquestionable that Jane Fonda here emerges as probably the finest screen actress of her generation. [...] She is the rock of integrity on which a sometimes shaky structure stands and one should see *Klute* if only to be present at her moment of triumph. [...] In a time when one hungers for movie characters one cares about, I came to care a great deal for this one woman’s liberation.¹⁷

¹⁴ Charles Champlin, ‘Jane Fonda in Sex, Suspense Thriller’, *Los Angeles Times View* (24 June 1971), p. 1.

¹⁵ Richard Schickel, ‘New Heights for a Fallen Fonda’, *Life* (30 July 1971) in ‘Clippings (USA)’, AJP/AMPAS.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

For Schickel, therefore, Fonda and Bree's intertwined spectacles of 'triumph' and 'liberation' were the co-dependent features that set *Klute* apart from its genre.

The 'heroic' dimensions bestowed on Fonda by Schickel were echoed by Pauline Kael – 'there isn't another young dramatic actress in American films who can touch her' – and both responses indicate how the film became entrenched in Fonda's activist persona.¹⁸ That feminist responses engaged with the film as a complex portrait of female identity attests to Fonda's wider signifying value for the contemporaneous women's movement.¹⁹ It is Fonda's ostensible 'heroism', nonetheless, that provides the context within which *Klute* has proven its versatility as an object of historical and cultural study from multiple perspectives. Bree survives the attempt on her life by Peter Cable (Charles Cioffi), the killer in *Klute*, and in so doing exposes links between Cable's perverse desire to possess, control and ultimately destroy women with his dominant, corporate perspective. Cable is repeatedly endowed with concealed POV shots of Bree, or represented within settings (like skyscrapers) that suggest his surveillance of the city in *Klute* is achieved through executive privilege. Leaping to his death in the latter part of the film when confronted by John Klute (Donald Sutherland) signifies both the collapse of Cable's perspective into that of total and irreparable psychosis and, moreover, the breakdown of the power structure he symbolises. Bree, in this regard, is driven to depend on Klute through being imperilled; the longevity of this status remains in doubt, however, due to the final scene's dissonant pairing of sonic and visual elements of the narrative. Specifically, Bree discusses her 'mixed' feelings toward Klute with her psychiatrist in voice-over and this is set against footage of her compliantly vacating her New York apartment, in

¹⁸ Pauline Kael, 'The Current Cinema', *New Yorker* (3 July 1971), p. 42.

¹⁹ See Perkins, 'The Politics of "Jane Fonda"', pp. 237-250.

order – it is assumed – to live with Klute. The images and the voice-over thus achieve a ‘sympathetic’ tension. Without the contemplation of Bree’s interiority throughout the film, this sequence would have potentially invoked the ‘feminine duplicity’ so frequently a feature of film *noir*; as the film’s denouement, however, it functions as a woman’s legitimate dilemma. In short, *Klute* consolidated its topicality within the metaphysical framework of film *noir*.

Pakula, Fonda, and the role of Bree Daniel

Klute cemented the ‘tough-yet-vulnerable’ identity that influenced Fonda’s later manifestations of character and ‘star’ yet production documents denote Pakula’s active participation in the construction of Bree’s individual agency as the film’s protagonist. Debating the question of Pakula’s influence, moreover, highlights some alternative authorial dimensions of *Klute* and his later collaborations with Fonda. Despite emerging as a prolific genre director of the 1970s, Pakula’s contribution to *Klute* was overlooked by the initial wave of criticism in favour of Fonda’s stardom and acting prowess. Indeed, contemporaneous reviews were positively frosty: ‘Pakula, when he is not indulging in subjective camera, strives to give his film the look of structural geometry, but despite the sharp edges and dramatic spaces and cinema presence out of *Citizen Kane*, it all suggests a tepid, rather tasteless mush,’ the *New York Times* complained.²⁰ *Time* questioned the combination of ‘suspenseful diversion and romantic melodrama’,²¹ and Pauline Kael’s *New Yorker* review ridiculed the film’s construction of suspense outright: ‘the shadows and the angles are as silly as a

²⁰ Roger Greenspun, ‘*Klute*, a Thriller with Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland’, *New York Times* (24 June 1971), p. 35.

²¹ Jay Cocks, ‘A Tenuous Balance’, *Time* (12 July 1971), p. 44.

fright wig.’²² Yet *Klute* forthwith became part of the vernacular for discussing Pakula’s significant contribution to the thriller genre during the 1970s, forming one third of his informal ‘paranoia trilogy’ along with *The Parallax View* and *All the President’s Men*. By 1976, Pakula’s prestige had also risen notably in scholarly circles, with Richard Jameson claiming in *Film Comment*: ‘There is no more classical filmmaker than Alan J. Pakula at work in the American cinema today. [...] Form itself is profoundly exciting to him; it constitutes an authentic and powerful event in itself, and that power comes across relentlessly onscreen.’²³ In a similar vein, Jameson also praised ‘the astonishing density of performance’ Pakula elicited from ‘the merest bit-player’.²⁴ This highlighted his function as a sympathetic ‘actor’s director’ during an era when New Hollywood *auteurs* exhibited overriding, iconoclastic influence in relation to their films. Pakula’s accentuation of both form *and* performance thus forces a reconsideration of *Klute* as a fundamentally collaborative project.

It is unsatisfactorily reductive to term *Klute* merely the first instalment in Pakula’s ‘paranoia trilogy’. Similarly, it is tempting to observe continuity between Fonda’s *tour de force* performance in *Klute*, her subsequent Academy Award for that performance, and her contemporaneous embrace of feminism; yet subsuming *Klute* within Fonda’s stardom in such a totalising way declines to sufficiently acknowledge the impact of Alan Pakula. Rather, through identifying Pakula’s willingness to nurture the construction of Bree, both via Fonda’s input and through the ‘total’ film, a more balanced view of *Klute* can be achieved. An acknowledgement of Fonda and Pakula’s symbiotic and complementary (rather than exclusive) construction of *Klute*, in turn,

²² Kael, ‘Current Cinema’, p. 43.

²³ Richard T. Jameson, ‘The Pakula Parallax’, *Film Comment* (September/October 1976), pp. 8-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

provides a framework for salvaging the theoretical and historical resonance of their subsequent films, *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover*.

Pakula's cultivation of Bree, and his sense of her centrality to the film, requires reconstruction using both published and unpublished sources. Fonda's contribution to the character, on the other hand, has remained constant; the film's initial reviews, and Fonda's dedicated chapter to *Klute* in her 2005 autobiography (in which she states 'I began searching for a way to play a call girl differently – tough, angry, but not totally hardened') provide the bookends for this legacy.²⁵ Fonda also recounts in her autobiography how the collaboration between herself and Pakula when working on *Klute* was both a lyrical journey ('Alan and I were so in synch that it was like having the perfect partner in a grand waltz') and a political one ('[Alan] had given me several books on the psychology of prostitution, and together we talked a lot about the power/control issues that surround gender').²⁶ Contemporaneous articles do reveal glimpses of this Fonda/Pakula 'partnership'; Joseph Gelmis profiled Pakula in *Newsday* and identified the labour and intensity with which the star and director approached some of the key scenes of *Klute*. For example, Gelmis reported how '[t]he sequences with the lady psychiatrist [...] last five minutes on screen [...] culled from four hours of improvisational confrontation', and suggested Fonda's anger in some frames of these scenes was engineered by Pakula 'deliberately' provoking her.²⁷ For the most part, though, *Klute* has been discussed either in terms of Fonda's career *or* Pakula's career, rather than as a film both figures contributed to in a mutually reinforcing manner. This perhaps provides an additional reason why Fonda and Pakula's broader collaboration across three films has been neglected by film scholars.

²⁵ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 251.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

²⁷ Joseph Gelmis, 'The Movies', *Newsday* (18 September 1971), p. 37W.

The instinct that Pakula harboured for centralising Bree's role in *Klute* is borne out by the film's production papers. These documents demonstrate a supportive approach to character that can be traced through their subsequent films, culminating in Fonda's contentious handling of political themes in *Rollover*. The portrait of Bree's construction emerging from Pakula's production notebooks anticipates the heraldic status applied to the character by enthusiastic critics – Bree as the principal bearer of meaning in *Klute*. In editing notes dated 30 October, 1970, written in response to a rough-cut screening of the film, Pakula reveals his investment in Bree as the volatile core of *Klute*: 'Where is there a place for the material in which she has the breakthrough with the psychiatrist? Is there a place for it? [...] The danger is that the psychiatrist material can make it less likely that she would act as irrationally as she does in turning to Frankie Ligourin [Bree's nefarious former pimp].'²⁸ These notes also grapple with the 'representability' of Bree's interior life: in no uncertain terms Pakula states '[w]e don't get inside Bree enough – trace her development.'²⁹ This cornerstone of the film's final spectacle is thus attributable to Pakula's commitment to exploring Bree's identity.

Pakula's desire to represent Bree's internal contradictions led him to make formal decisions about the tone and composition of *Klute*. His notebooks reveal how he perceived 'an area of emptiness and terrible pretension in the film and unrelieved darkness'.³⁰ Part of the solution, for Pakula, existed on a sonic level: 'Should there be some kind of siren call musical theme propelling the film? Bree's siren call to men...something seductive – in a dark, compulsive, mysterious, repetitive way...as if

²⁸ Alan Pakula, 'Notebooks' (30 October 1970), file 251, box 34, AJP/AMPAS.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

pulling the characters into the labyrinth?’³¹ This element, realised in Michael Small’s original soundtrack, further layered the representational presence of Bree and was paired with exposition denoting the mounting threat Cable posed to her in the film. Crucially, the remainder of Pakula’s notes consolidate the motif of Bree’s contradictory desires: ‘Cut the whole film for the simple story of a lady with a compulsion to seduce that almost destroys her. *Keep focus on BREE. Klute is audience point of view on her and the catalyst. She is the heart, soul and development of the film* [original emphasis].’³² Pakula’s dilemma, namely the reconciliation of expressionist form with linear content, is indicative of certain New Hollywood impulses during this period. He grappled with the issue of coherent storytelling in the Hollywood style versus a more self-consciously ‘artistic’ vision of ‘European’ proportions. Fonda’s performance at the heart of *Klute* functioned as the preponderant symbol of this struggle: she was the ‘Europeanised’ star returned Stateside, reframing a quintessentially American genre.

Fonda and Pakula’s collaboration received a swift and supportive round of responses from Hollywood insiders when the film premiered. In congratulations memos from figures in the industry, Pakula’s directorial vision and Fonda’s exemplary performance were applauded. Stephanie Phillips, a senior agent at CMA Associates, informed Pakula that every major actress she knew had expressed an interest in his future projects and coincidentally, Barbra Streisand (the most ‘bankable’ female star of the period) sent word via a PR firm of her interest in working under his direction.³³ These responses alluded to a fascination with Fonda

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Memo from Stephanie Phillips to Pakula (undated), ‘Correspondence’, File 248, box 34, AJP/AMPAS.

and Pakula's construction of Bree and the world of *Klute*. Indeed, this fascination would impact on their subsequent realisation of later collaborative projects. Fonda and Pakula had pushed the boundaries of *noir*; revising the mythologies of the Western constituted an altogether more challenging task.

Comes a Horseman: frontier politics

The intervening years between the release of *Klute* in 1971 and *Comes a Horseman* in 1978 comprise manifold upheavals in terms of social, political and cultural phenomena. For the purposes of this chapter, a set of core factors should be outlined forthwith. Firstly, Fonda's mainstream resurgence after Vietnam (as discussed in chapter 1) was partly predicated through tempering her political persona in the mainstream press and partly by drawing attention to socio-political inequalities in American society. These processes had gained momentum following Nixon's resignation over the Watergate crisis and took firmer political shape in the guise of Fonda and Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy [CED] movement. Having manifested through her public/political persona since the early-1970s, Fonda's fictional identities onscreen began to assume socially conscious dimensions more consistently and *Comes a Horseman* constitutes an ambitious, if commercially unsuccessful, case in point.³⁴ Moreover, *Klute* had introduced a number of motifs that reoccurred in Pakula and Fonda's subsequent films with renewed vigour and a greater political purpose – the latter feature arising largely from Fonda's parallel involvement with IPC Films and CED.

³⁴ *Julia*, the predecessor to *Comes a Horseman* in terms of historical prestige, profiled Lillian Hellman's anti-fascist activism. *Fun with Dick and Jane*, according to Fonda, attempted to rally America's vast middle class.

The relative impact of *Klute* upon *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* clustered into three major areas of representation: each featured a complex female protagonist, a corporate male villain, and the exposure of an overarching power structure, arising from a struggle between the first two elements. More broadly, the shift from film *noir* to the Western in Fonda and Pakula's output is also less jarring than it may seem. Both genres in their 'classical' form (with the gangster film acting as a surrogate for *noir* in the following excerpt) are positioned dialectically by film historian Colin McArthur when he argues:

The western and the gangster film have a special relationship with American society. Both deal with critical phases of American history. It could be said that they represent America talking to itself about, in the case the western, its agrarian past, and in the case of the gangster film/thriller, its urban technological present.³⁵

Comes a Horseman and *Klute* display components of the 'past' and 'present' dichotomy that McArthur outlines above but it is each film's fluidity between these elements that highlights the revisionist use of genre at the heart of Fonda and Pakula's collaboration. Far from being bound discretely to their respective realms of past and present, *Comes a Horseman* and *Klute* utilised both by incorporating elements of generic 'heritage' (i.e. their formal 'past') into narratives reflecting contemporaneous issues, such as gender and the onset of a corporate society.

³⁵ Colin McArthur, *Underworld USA* (London: BFI, 1972), p. 18.

The visual construction and *mise-en-scène* of *Comes a Horseman* differs from *Klute* manifestly yet exhibits shared devices when representing power and intrigue. Whereas *Klute* is primarily bound up in shots of New York City and frequently explores space vertically (such as shots of the elevator shaft in Mr. Goldfarb's building), *Comes a Horseman* presents a spectacle dominated by majestic landscapes and dramatic weather patterns, thus constructing a distinctly 'horizontal', painterly view of the American West. Cinematographer Gordon Willis, with whom Pakula worked on both films, nonetheless employed his trademark low-key lighting when representing the interior spaces in both films. This resulted in characters (especially those driven by suspect impulses like Peter Cable and Ewing) being lit by the minimum smallest source possible, like a candle, or street lighting/neon in the case of *Klute*.³⁶ This dimension was a visual strategy for representing power and malice as personified by the actors and also coded by the unlit recesses of the frame. The boundaries between *noir* and the Western during these moments thus blurred, indicating the residual presence of *Klute* in Pakula's approach to this, America's other signature genre.

As a revisionist Western, *Comes a Horseman* followed a noteworthy (if rather informal) industrial trend of the 1970s. Unlike film *noir*, Westerns were being less revived than re-evaluated; subjected to a form of cultural autopsy driven by liberal sensibilities. Thomas Schatz describes the early-1970s as giving rise to 'Vietnam Westerns', whereby the depiction of westward expansion functioned as a metaphor

³⁶ Willis acquired a nickname of 'The Prince of Darkness' with reference to the lighting techniques he used on such films as *The Godfather* (1972), *The Parallax View*, and *All the President's Men*.

for America's foray into south-east Asia.³⁷ It follows, therefore, that *Comes a Horseman* had been green lit on the basis of two major leftist features: the collaboration of Fonda and Pakula and the success of *All the President's Men*.³⁸ The 'progressive package' of Fonda and Pakula grappling with the Western indicates, furthermore, that adapting the genre was considered a viable prospect in the wake of Watergate, which, in conjunction with Vietnam, forced a re-evaluation of entrenched notions of American national identity. Indeed, Pakula recounted his involvement with *Comes a Horseman* in a 1979 interview for the journal *American Film* using the following terms:

Comes a Horseman is a kind of Dreiserian Western that deals with very specific American myths and with very specific personal relationships among three people. All I know is that one part of me once wanted to be a psychiatrist, another part of me would have been very happy being a historian. I am very interested in political society, and I am very interested in the personal pursuit of happiness.³⁹

The reference to novelist Theodore Dreiser is notable, because Dreiser is considered unique amongst the American naturalists. Literary critic Carl Van Doren describes him as possessing 'the characteristics of what for lack of a better native term we have to call the peasant type – the type to which Gorki belongs and which Tolstoy wanted

³⁷ Arthur Penn's *Little Big Man* (1970), for example, retold events from the Native American perspective. Thomas Schatz, 'The Western', in Wes D. Gehring (ed.), *Handbook of American Film Genres* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 33.

³⁸ Jim Peltz, 'Comes a Horseman Filming Starts at Westcliffe', *Canon City Daily Record* (3 June 1977), p. 3.

³⁹ Alan J. Pakula, 'Dialogue on Film', *American Film* (December-January 1979), p. 37.

to belong to'.⁴⁰ These combined factors ostensibly predisposed *Comes a Horseman* toward politically nuanced generic revisionism.

Using Marxist inspired textual analysis, film theorists Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner suggest the Western genre in its traditional form had all but been dismantled by the mid-1970s. They argue that Western mythology went through an assaultive process of 'demystification', resulting in films that were at best elegiac (*The Ballad of Cable Hogue* [1970]) or else generically subversive (*McCabe & Mrs Miller* [1971]) and even outright satirical (*Blazing Saddles* [1974]).⁴¹ *Comes a Horseman* thus constituted a late addition to this phenomenon yet comprised contradictory elements that Ryan and Kellner otherwise attempt to cleanly demarcate; the film employs elegiac and subversive devices in relatively equal measures, such as 'reverential' cinematography on the one hand and a corporate power theme on the other. Indeed, the 'myth' subverting Ryan and Kellner's central argument is that the Western had been in crystalline generic form in the first place. Steve Neale's work on Hollywood genres identifies, crucially, that it had long been practice to 're-version' Westerns in an effort to maximise their crossover appeal. The need to appeal to women as well as men, for example, was evidenced by Musical Westerns, such as *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950).⁴² In this regard, the 'demystified' Westerns of the New Hollywood period are better termed an additional cycle of re-versioned films consonant with their 'politically aware' audiences. *Comes a Horseman* engaged issues of genre, gender and encroaching corporate power at the tail end of this cycle.

⁴⁰ Carl Van Doren, *Contemporary American Novelists* (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2007), p. 66.

⁴¹ Ryan and Kellner, *Camera Politica*, pp. 79-80.

⁴² Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 141.

Partly a David and Goliath story and partly a movie mourning the ‘passing’ of the Old West, *Comes a Horseman* comprises contradictory elements that reveal more through their lack of reconciliation. The plot is centred around the ongoing feud between independent ranch owner Ella Connors and cattle baron J.W. Ewing. Ella enlists the help of war veteran Frank Athearn (James Caan) to revive the fortunes of her failing ranch, and in the process the pair fall in love. Meanwhile, Ewing faces the prospect of having his ancestral ranch seized against his will by an unscrupulous oil tycoon and resorts to foul play rather than see his land stripmined. Having organised ‘sticky ends’ for the tycoon and his representative at the bank, Ewing attempts to murder Ella and Frank by setting light to their ranch house. Ella and Frank escape from the burning building and slay Ewing and his men in a climactic shootout. The final sequence depicts Ella returning to the site of her ranch with fresh wood, preparing to rebuild her house with Frank. By finishing with a potent image of hope, *Comes a Horseman* suggests an alignment with traditional Western values – Ella and Frank are effectively ‘rebuilding’ The West. Conversely, this image is simultaneously overshadowed by the imminent threat the booming oil industry poses to The West as a whole, evident throughout much of the underlying narrative of the film. *Comes a Horseman*, in this regard, is a warning against the rapaciousness of capitalism. It is this conflation of opposing messages that permeates *Comes a Horseman* and reveals the central contradiction of Fonda and Pakula’s political foray into the Western genre.

The characterisation of Ella, like Bree in *Klute*, provides a means of deciphering many of the principal objectives and tensions underpinning the conception of *Comes a Horseman*. Firstly, the depiction of a female protagonist in a Western constituted an audacious move. In playing this role, Fonda had joined a select

few of independent screen heroines, such as Barbara Stanwyck (*Cattle Queen of Montana* [1954]), Joan Crawford (*Johnny Guitar* [1954]) and Doris Day (*Calamity Jane* [1953]). Ella's function within Fonda and Pakula's collaboration was less an homage to these stars, though; production documents for the film reveal that *Comes a Horseman* had attempted to be as much a Western imbued with contemporary themes as *Klute* was a 'contemporary' film *noir*. In notes dated 28 July 1976, Pakula affirmed the film's engagement with gender issues: 'Ella's fear of being possessed and losing freedom and identity is a very contemporary feminine theme and Frank's learning to deal with it is an important contemporary male theme.'⁴³ This allusion to female autonomy comes remarkably close to echoing the fears harboured by Bree Daniels toward John Klute. Indeed, Pakula had demarcated Ella and Bree explicitly in character notes written the previous year, dated 22 June, 1975: 'Ella is a woman mobilized toward a very specific goal in a way that Bree Daniels would have envied...Ella has a sense of identity – with her father, with the land, the sense of commitment to a righteous fight that fills her life – that Bree Daniels would have longed for.'⁴⁴ There is a sense, therefore, that between 1975 and 1976 Ella's characterisation began to exhibit qualities more closely associated with Bree than were originally intended.

Bree and Ella were separated by genre, setting, and goal orientation, yet inadvertent connections arising between the two characters (and thus between the two films) reveal common impulses in terms of representing gender and power. Earlier drafts of the screenplay, for example, depicted the battle of wills between Ella and

⁴³ Alan Pakula, 'Notes' (28 July 1976), file 144, box 21, AJP/AMPAS.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Ewing as deriving from a long dead sexual relationship.⁴⁵ Moreover, a review of the film in the leftist film journal *Cinéaste* reported Fonda's claim that Ella had originally been written as a hooker (indicating a significant connection to Bree): 'Fonda insisted on playing the role straight and thus she breaks through the conventional division of women into virgins and whores in the Western film.'⁴⁶ While this account of Fonda's intervention alludes to a progressive handling of gender and genre in *Comes a Horseman* that wrestles free from representations of female sexuality, the film is – from one perspective – indebted dramaturgically to *Klute*. Ewing and Ella's backstory is forged in the heat of sexual knowledge and his subsequent drive to destroy her echoes Peter Cable's perverse quest to eliminate Bree. The slow burning romance between Ella and Frank also mirrors the sexual tension between Bree and Klute, although Ella's feelings toward Frank are never in doubt at the film's end – rather, it is the fate of the Old West hangs in the balance.

The contemporaneous developments in Fonda's political persona serve to further contextualise Pakula's approach in characterising Ella. This suggests that he intended to address dual themes of gender and corporate power through Ella's characterisation. In his 1975 notes, Pakula muses: 'Jane F.'s obsessive quality – to achieve – as in Hayden campaign – very useful in this role. In the drive and motivation toward a specific goal, much like what Jane is now – and very, very different from Bree Daniels.'⁴⁷ Notably, Pakula's sentiments as expressed here carried through to publicising the film on talk shows. In a 1978 interview on The Dick Cavett Show, Pakula stated:

⁴⁵ Dennis Lynton Clark wrote the screenplay.

⁴⁶ Carol Barko, 'Comes a Horseman', *Cinéaste* (Winter 1978/1979), p. 48.

⁴⁷ Pakula, 'Notes' (22 June 1975), AJP/AMPAS. 'Hayden campaign' refers to Tom Hayden's unsuccessful 1976 bid for the Senate.

When I first met [Fonda] during *Klute*, she'd just been radicalized. [...] She was tense, she was highly-strung. She was wonderful for that role. And now, it's all come together and it's matured, and it's mellowed. [...] What Jane is today was wonderful for *Comes a Horseman*. What she was seven years ago was wonderful for *Klute*.⁴⁸

Three points can be extrapolated from Pakula's comments above. Firstly, the perceived 'maturity' of Fonda's image during this period was a recurring theme in contemporaneous reportage, hitherto discussed with reference to the release of *Julia* and *Coming Home*. Secondly, Pakula discusses *Klute* and *Comes a Horseman* as though he were showcasing her political identities through the films they made together rather than talking about her as an actress who could play anything, regardless of her politics. Thirdly, and most significantly, Pakula's description of Fonda's transition 'through' radicalism to being 'right' for *Comes a Horseman* suggested a cyclical process; Fonda had journeyed from the cutting edge of society to inhabit the hallowed ground of the Western genre, a realm keenly associated with her father, Henry.⁴⁹ This development indicated the extent to which Pakula and Fonda's ventures together – as director and star – relied on a symbiotic system of meaning generation in various political, cultural and industrial contexts. In other words, one did not 'displace' the other but rather provided affirmation; had Fonda been directed by a more conservative director, less engaged with her political identity, then her engagement with the Hollywood Western would have exhibited an altogether

⁴⁸ Pakula quoted in 'Interview with Alan J. Pakula [transcript]', *Cinemonkey* (Winter 1979), p. 28. The interview aired on 13 November 1978.

⁴⁹ Jane's only previous association with the Western genre, *Cat Ballou* (1965), was both a far lighter film than *Horseman* and also predated her politicisation.

different ‘pioneering’ quality. This factor influenced the parameters within which *Comes a Horseman* could attempt to revise mythologies at the heart of Hollywood’s signature genre.

Upon its release in the autumn of 1978, *Comes a Horseman* received a lukewarm round of responses from mainstream critics. *Time* magazine described the film as ‘a liberal-minded Western [...] so carefully thought out that it seems cut and dried. [...] *Comes a Horseman* ultimately comes to nothing.’⁵⁰ Positively, Pakula was described as ‘a major cinematic stylist’ who had ‘coaxed a performance from Fonda that is superior to her rather saintly appearances in *Julia* and *Coming Home*. [...] This beautiful woman manages to capture the essence of frontier toughness.’⁵¹ Observation of this sort echoed Fonda’s desire to embody ‘ordinary’ individuals going through extraordinary change; the frontier setting carried the ‘weight’ of history and legitimised Fonda’s stardom in a typically conservative sphere of representation. *Newsweek* explicitly cited the revisionist impulses of *Comes a Horseman*. Jack Kroll’s review acknowledged how Fonda and Pakula had ‘taken this most macho of all movie formulas – the basic old Western myth of good vs. bad, the white hats riding against the black hats – and they’ve added feeling, intelligence and a touch of feminism’.⁵² Pakula had approached the Western with ambitions similar to his handling of film *noir* in *Klute*, Kroll noted, yet the film was deemed a flawed effort.

The scope of *Comes a Horseman*’s flaws was discussed by David Denby in *New York* magazine. Denby expressed disdain for the film as both a ‘heritage’ project

⁵⁰ Frank Rich, ‘The Tame West’, *Time* (6 November 1978), p. 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Jack Kroll, ‘Calamity Jane’, *Newsweek* (30 October 1978) in ‘Clippings’, file 132, box 19, AJP/AMPAS.

and one pertaining to contemporaneous feminism. His review felled the major contributors one by one: Pakula ‘has made the dreary mistake of reducing a half-dead genre to its basic elements’, Gordon Willis had underlit the film (‘unfortunately, the movie audience is not composed of bats’) and Fonda ‘just seems parched and depleted, she’s taken the fun out of the role without adding much depth’.⁵³ This was acerbic criticism, and Denby’s discussion of Ella’s transformative journey from tomboy to damsel exposed a significant compromise. ‘Feminists may be offended by what happens next’, he noted, referring to the developing love story between Ella and Frank – ‘Fonda lets her hair down, puts on a dress, and goes square dancing with Caan, a radiant smile on her face’.⁵⁴ Highlighted in these terms, Ella’s characterisation constituted a regressive rather than progressive portrait of female identity at odds with both Fonda’s politics and elementary notions of contemporaneous feminism.

Despite its questionable representation of gender, *Comes a Horseman* received endorsement from film journalists attuned to its revisionist ambitions. *Cinéaste* trumpeted the feminist undertone of the film, arguing this was not only legitimate, but also long overdue:

In diaries, journals and other writings, women of the real West have left an impressive record of their own exploits and experiences, and the very active role they played, sometimes single-handedly, in the settling of the West. Yet, the film western, which has been around since the beginnings of cinema, has rarely given us memorable images of these frontierswomen, who were neither

⁵³ David Denby, ‘All Dreary on the Western Front’, *New York* (13 November 1978), p. 128.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

virgins nor whores, but who rode, roped, and fought their way to survival amidst the rigors of the American wilderness. Alan Pakula's latest film, *Comes a Horseman*, sets the record straight. He shows that the West has a *her story* as well as a *history* [original emphasis].⁵⁵

While noting the centrality of gender in the film, the *Cinéaste* review nevertheless directed its praise and criticism squarely at Pakula and made only brief asides to the 'gusto and sincerity' that Fonda brought to her performance as Ella. Accordingly, the film was seen to reflect his desire 'to give the western a contemporary relevance, Pakula uses the genre as a vehicle to express some of the same preoccupation with themes of good and evil, fear and paranoia, personal freedom and individual heroism that is present in his other films'.⁵⁶ This was not deemed a successful strategy, however, and the review criticised other motifs, including 'the Calamity Jane film cliché of the tomboy feminized under the influence of love', echoing Denby's line of argument.⁵⁷ Although references to Fonda were scant, *Cinéaste* did slight the film's ending categorising it 'part of the hopeful political message of both Fonda and Pakula', suggesting the duo had attempted (and failed) to tailor the Western genre to reformist designs.

More balanced praise was forthcoming in *New Times*, a publication launched by George Hirsch, who had previously published *New York* magazine. Critic Richard Corliss observed: 'no other American director makes more intelligent movies – intelligent in the choices of shots and settings, and in the subtle feelings expressed

⁵⁵ Barko, 'Comes a Horseman', p. 48.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

through the performances – than Alan Pakula.’⁵⁸ The lion’s share of the praise, however, was lavished on Fonda and its delivery revealed tensions underpinning her wider persona. Corliss established his admiration of Fonda’s stardom thusly: ‘star quality like Fonda’s doesn’t intrude on a characterization; it enriches it. We’re drawn to the character because we’re drawn to the star. We study it and stare at it like enlightened voyeurs.’⁵⁹ While his choice of a voyeuristic metaphor exhibited irony, Corliss attempted to incorporate Fonda’s attributes into a consolidated whole: ‘no matter how she’s lighted, she looks terrific. We needn’t feel guilty about admiring Fonda as a movie star, because her intelligence and passion are part of her beauty.’⁶⁰ In this regard, *Comes a Horseman* constituted a cohesive star image vehicle, but its function should also be evaluated in broader contexts.

As an heroic frontier figure within the film’s commentary on capitalism Ella’s characterisation resonated for Fonda’s contemporaneous causes. In discussing one of Ella’s confrontation scenes with Ewing, Corliss recounted: ‘Fonda stands facing her scrawny two-story home as Robards mumbles something vaguely threatening in her direction. She listens, silent and erect, as if posing for a heroic feminist statue [...] she’s as hard, dry, burnished and beautiful as the dirt-earth around her.’⁶¹ Notably, this observation alluded to Ella’s relationship with both the land and her society, ‘standing out’ by exhibiting feminist behaviour yet ultimately being a product of her humble environment. Playing a working rancher also meant Fonda lacked the bohemian chic of Bree Daniel; as Ella, Fonda’s costume and demeanour exuded physical labour, even ruggedness. Concurrently, Fonda and Hayden had cultivated

⁵⁸ Corliss, ‘Western Anagram’, p. 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

media coverage designed to profile the ‘unprivileged’ nature of their daily life, evidenced by features such as the 1975 issue of *People* discussed in chapter 1. This strategy typically focused on the modesty of their two-story home in the then déclassé neighbourhood of Santa Monica, and was actively promoted well into the late-1970s.⁶²

In a typical example from 1978, *McCall's* published a profile as much about the star's meagre existence as her fame; indeed, each had become a feature of the other. The importance of ‘setting’ was revealed in the article's opening description: ‘The kitchen is suffocatingly hot. Several years ago the hundred-year old wood-frame house had no electricity. There is still no insulation. [Fonda's] bed is a mattress on the floor that she shares with her second husband, political activist Tom Hayden.’⁶³ Living in an environment fit for her Western screen surrogate was revealed as intentional. The article quoted Fonda's belief: ‘if you're a political organizer – which I am – you can't deal with people unless you share their problems.’⁶⁴ This indicated Fonda placed extraordinary significance on all aspects of her daily existence, and, moreover, how this manifested in the media at large.

A final connection between the *McCall's* profile and *Comes a Horseman* is revealed by the film's publicity files. These files indicate that Caan and Fonda had final approval over the photographs used for publicity, and there is direct reference to

⁶² By 1980, however, Hayden had begun to disingenuously term media profiles of their home life ‘an invasion of privacy’, indicating a shift in his position regarding the private and public spheres of everyday life. ‘What's upsetting is that your porch, your dog, your children, your wife, your bed gradually become the object of public scrutiny, so that at a certain point I'm not sure if they're all props or whether they're real.’ Hayden quoted in Danae Brook, ‘At Home With Tom and Jane’, *LA Weekly* (28 November 1980), p. 13.

⁶³ Aljean Harmetz, ‘A Star is Reborn’, *McCall's* (January 1978), p. 104.

⁶⁴ Fonda quoted in Harmetz, ‘A Star is Reborn’, p. 125.

negotiations regarding the *McCall's* interview. In a typed note from the film's publicist, Harry Clein, to Pakula, Clein states: 'Scratch Brooke Hayward. When I mentioned that *McCall's* had assigned her to write a piece, Jane told me that in no way would she agree to it. She wants to do *McCall's* but not with Brooke.'⁶⁵ Despite *Comes a Horseman* not being an IPC film, this level of influence on Fonda's part (over her photographs *and* her interviewer) suggested that pieces such as the *McCall's* interview and photos were subject to certain choreographic controls. It also makes a case for considering Fonda's films and their accompanying media as not just reflexive but also connective mechanisms bearing the load of her political identity.

Comes a Horseman, in its most politicised form, portrayed a 'simpler' way of life thrown into crisis by runaway capitalism. As *Cinéaste* noted: '*Comes a Horseman* involves the traditional Western conflict between the forces of wilderness and the forces of civilization, [yet] the 40s setting modernizes this conflict into a more contemporary ecological conflict about land use.'⁶⁶ In this instance, the political and cinematic aspects of Fonda's stardom had not translated into commercial success, though, as her two other Hollywood films of 1978, *California Suite* and *Coming Home*, had achieved far healthier box office returns. Indeed, *Comes a Horseman* fixated on the 'simplicity' of frontier life to a seemingly austere degree; the box office leaders of 1978 by contrast (*Grease*, *Superman* and *Animal House*) encoded the trope of 'simplicity' within their narratives of reactionary nostalgia. Invoking the 'lost simplicity' of frontier imagery within American politics, nonetheless, would prove a longer term diversion for Fonda, Hayden and the CED.

⁶⁵ Typed note from Clein to Pakula (27 May 1977), 'Publicity', file 149, box 21, AJP/AMPAS.

⁶⁶ Barko, '*Comes a Horseman*', p. 49.

The ubiquity of frontier imagery in American life influenced Fonda and Hayden's conception of their political identities in the late-1970s and early-1980s. Film historian Robert Ray provides an historical basis for this development when he argues '[t]he radical fashions of the 1960s and 1970s concealed the obvious: the traditional American mythology had survived as the generally accepted account of America's history and future.'⁶⁷ This phenomenon, in turn, provided a meaningful link between the shared themes of *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover*, which both fixate on frontier set (literally and metaphorically) crises to varying degrees. Whereas *Comes a Horseman* offered an elegiac portrait of capitalism's excesses, *Rollover* would adopt a 'doomsday' strategy – capitalism as America's financial time bomb.

***Rollover*: the 'economic frontier'**

Rollover, the fourth release of Fonda's IPC Films and her final collaboration with Pakula, brandished political ambitions of the highest order, yet also constituted the most conspicuous commercial failure for each outfit. In one sense, then, *Rollover* explains why IPC did not subsequently pursue 'message movies' on the same scale again and also why Fonda and Pakula did not work together on any future projects. Yet equating the film's political ambitions with box office performance, while damning in a commercial context, also provides a broader insight into such phenomena as Fonda's mainstream standing and the ongoing viability of commercial-political Hollywood films. In the last section of this chapter, the development/production history of *Rollover* is discussed, followed by the disparity

⁶⁷ Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the American Cinema, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 296.

between the film's promotion strategies and its reception, and finally the resonance of *Rollover* for Fonda's politicised stardom.

The first of Fonda's films to be produced during the Reagan era, *Rollover* was a 'fiscal thriller' set in the contemporaneous world of high finance. It suggested the American banking system (in the wake of the OPEC crisis) depended precariously on short-term deposits of oil rich Arab investors: the day-by-day reinvestment of these funds – known as 'rolling over' – thus provided the necessary capital for American banks to function, and by extension, fortify the American economy. If this failed to occur, which constituted the film's principal concern, the banking system would collapse and a global economic catastrophe would ensue. This doomsday scenario rendered a stark vision of corporate machinations in American society, and, moreover, represented America's economic power in a state of perpetual crisis amidst an OPEC-reliant world order.

In *Rollover*, Fonda plays glamorous ex-movie star Lee Winters, who inherits her husband's petrochemical firm, Winterchem, when he is murdered under mysterious circumstances. In an effort to shore up control of the company, Lee becomes involved both professionally and romantically with financial trouble-shooter Hub Smith (Kris Kristofferson), who is simultaneously attempting to salvage the fortunes of an ailing Wall Street bank, Borough National. Lee and Hub develop a joint strategy to expand her company and travel to Saudi Arabia to secure a sizable loan. As Lee seeks to acquire more control over Winterchem, she unwittingly uncovers an international finance network centred around a tight-knit elite of Arab investors, of which she suspects Hub may be an accessory. Threatened by the prospect of exposure

when Lee offers her silence in exchange for sole control of Winterchem, the investors decline to rollover their deposits in American banks and the close of the film depicts a world descending into financial meltdown and anarchy. Meanwhile, Lee and Hub rendezvous on the now defunct trading floor of Borough National in order to face the new chaotic world order together, hopeful of a new beginning.

The colossal decline of western capitalism presented in *Rollover* was more commercially grounded than its synopsis might otherwise suggest. In 1976, a novel by Paul Erdman entitled *The Crash of '79* concluded with the collapse of all global currency, stock, and commodity markets after the Shah of Iran orders a series of nuclear strikes in the Middle East, thus rendering the planet's principal oilfields radioactive wastelands.⁶⁸ Providing gripping entertainment as well as simplifying complex fiscal terms for layman readers, *The Crash of '79* spent over ten months on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Indeed, upon his death in 2007, the *Times* newspaper credited Erdman, a former economist and banker himself, with having invented 'a literary genre – the financial thriller. [...] His new genre, rooted in historical fact, well-researched monetary trends and detailed matters of international finance, was perhaps best exemplified by *The Crash of '79*,' claimed the paper.⁶⁹ While the makers of *Rollover* never formally linked the film with Erdman's novel, a few reviewers did so freely upon its release, implying a crossover appeal. In her review for the *Los Angeles Times*, Sheila Benson directly referred to *The Crash of '79* and also suggested *Rollover* took the near-disaster scenario of *The China Syndrome* one step further by depicting a global economic meltdown.⁷⁰ Similarly, 'Rollover will

⁶⁸ Paul E. Erdman, *The Crash of '79* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976).

⁶⁹ <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article1722875.ece>. Accessed 3 July 2010.

⁷⁰ Sheila Benson, 'The Crash of '82, the Crunch of '34', *Los Angeles Times Calendar* (10 December 1981), p. 1.

presumably do for international banking what *The China Syndrome* did for nuclear energy', mused Phyllis Stewart in *Newsday*.⁷¹ For some critics, Fonda's enduring status as the 'prophetess' of Three Mile Island thus harboured the potential to raise suspicions over the robustness of the American economy, in line with Erdman's novel. For others, such as Gene Siskel, comparing *The China Syndrome* and *Rollover* constituted the difference in thriller potential between 'a nuclear reactor and a bank balance'.⁷² Matching the runaway success enjoyed by *The Crash of '79* was, therefore, a momentous task for *Rollover*, not just because of the difference in media but also because the nation's political climate, by 1981, had altered significantly.

In relation to genre, *Rollover* appeared well poised to capitalise on its assets as Fonda and Pakula had proven track records in conspiracy thrillers (*The China Syndrome*; *All the President's Men*); a lateral move into the territory of 'financial thrillers', therefore, harboured manifold possibilities. Yet the release and subsequent slump of *Rollover* in late-1981, well after many landmark films in the conspiracy genre, may indicate that such thrillers had gone into temporary decline. Indeed, the extent to which Americans were embracing conservative figures of economic hope rather than heeding leftist economic naysayers was alluded to by the inaugural address of Ronald Reagan: 'In this present [economic] crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem.'⁷³ While Fonda and Pakula had acquired notable status highlighting the abuse of power at the heart of Nixon's government, Reagan's presidency headlined a reinvigorated and altogether different Republican movement. *Rollover* therefore risked trading in outmoded images and themes in

⁷¹ Phyllis Stewart, 'Jane Fonda Comes of Age', *Newsday* (13 December 1981), p. 4.

⁷² Gene Siskel, 'In *Rollover*, Fonda is Chairman of the Board', *Chicago Tribune* (11 December 1981), p. 3.

⁷³ Ronald Reagan, *Speaking My Mind: Selected Speeches* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), p. 61. Reagan delivered his inaugural address on 20 January 1981.

relation to what ‘conspiracy’ and ‘abuse of power’ meant for the emerging American consciousness.

A closer examination of the film’s production documents suggests that the various generic components of the film (financial conspiracy; love story; political commentary) were competing rather than complementary elements. In its earliest incarnation, *Rollover* had been conceived as a portrait of declining American economic power in an OPEC dominated world. Research clippings compiled for the film’s production files exhibit a collective theme of apprehension toward this perceived global configuration. Drawn from a narrow time frame between 1979 and 1981, these clippings include reportage from national newspapers and the business press, such as *Forbes* magazine.⁷⁴ Annotations on the photocopied articles reveal that Fonda had been on the research distribution lists, indicating the ongoing investment IPC had in propelling the idea forward and her ‘unofficial’ creative and production duties.⁷⁵ One particular article from 1981, ‘OPEC’s Intended Strategy’ in *Forbes* magazine, may have also been passed to Tom Hayden, as it is annotated ‘Tom – scary?!’ in writing resembling Fonda’s, samples of which are also to be found in Pakula’s papers.⁷⁶ This article considered OPEC’s published report reviewing its past and future policy, and painted an alarmist portrait of the cartel’s influence: ‘it would have been inconceivable a decade ago but now it is happening – Saudi Arabia openly

⁷⁴ Examples include Youssef Ibrahim, ‘Old Rich, Oil Rich: The West vs. OPEC’, *New York Times* (30 November 1980), p. F1; Maurice Barnfather, ‘The Arab Connection’, *Forbes* (9 June 1980), pp. 35-36. Both articles form part of ‘Research Clippings’, file 464, box 67, AJP/AMPAS.

⁷⁵ As with all three of IPC’s previous features, Fonda declined to be credited as a producer.

⁷⁶ No-one in the film’s senior ranks or research team was named ‘Tom’. Also, Fonda later conceded ‘Tom was the one who first got me and Bruce [Gilbert] thinking about the subject. He thought it would be important to do a movie about this most fundamental issue’. Fonda quoted in Mike Bygrave and Joan Goodman, ‘Jane Fonda: Banking on Message Movies’, *American Film* (November 1981), p. 38.

tries to dictate American economic policy.’⁷⁷ Furthermore, the article described OPEC as a ‘ruthless monopoly’ awash with a ‘sense of power or triumph’ at bringing its influence to bear on the West. Most significantly of all, *Forbes* suggested that disseminating this review of OPEC’s future policies ‘may help awaken the American people to the seriousness of the situation and of the need to press on with development of alternative energy sources such as nuclear, coal, shale and solar’.⁷⁸ The mention of solar power echoed one of the key points in Fonda and Hayden’s CED agenda, suggesting the central themes of *Rollover* could be moulded in that direction. More broadly, *Forbes* had identified a significant imbalance of power that required the ‘awakening’ of the American people, an issue linking abstractly the agendas of Fonda/Hayden and Pakula.

Thematically and visually, *Rollover* exhibits many hallmarks of a Pakula film. It explores concepts of executive power in both formal and narrative terms, and features conspiratorial dimensions akin to that of the Parallax Corporation in *The Parallax View*. The central set-piece of Borough National Bank’s trading floor is also reminiscent of the Washington Post newsroom in *All the President’s Men*, suggesting Pakula also maintained a shared vision with his production designer on both films, George Jenkins. Fonda’s coding within *Rollover*’s *mise-en-scène* also carries many of the film’s themes; Lee’s costumes exude opulence throughout and she glides through sumptuous settings, many of which turn progressively hostile as she investigates her husband’s murder. For example, Hub saves Lee from being run over by a speeding limousine driven by an unseen assassin; a symbol of wealth Lee would otherwise use

⁷⁷ Editors (uncredited), ‘OPEC’s Intended Strategy’, *Forbes* (19 January 1981), p. 32, in ‘Research Clippings’, AJP/AMPAS.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

to navigate the city thus becomes a weapon used against her once she has acquired knowledge of the narrative's central conspiracy.

Rollover comprises generic elements that border, at times, on incongruity, and production documents reveal the script was a source of behind-the-scenes conflict between Pakula and Fonda. Specifically, Fonda and Pakula were each aiming to focus *Rollover* in a particular direction: Pakula's interest lay in the representation of a financial conspiracy as primarily a cinematic enterprise whereas Fonda was drawn to the interrogative dimensions such a representation would, or could, acquire for ordinary Americans, thus utilising commercial cinema proactively as a political platform.

Fonda's contributions to the development of her character and specific aspects of the script are contained within Pakula's archival papers and denote key areas of contention. In a set of proposed rewrites, dated 4 January, 1980, Fonda stressed her desire for the Saudi characters to carry representational meaning for the film's political subtext: 'we need to understand that the Saudis are demanding and obtaining control of their money just as they've had control of their oil since 1974.'⁷⁹ Moreover, the symbolic function of the Saudis in the script was partly to highlight America's need to evolve away from an oil dependant economy. Fonda's proposed rewrites of Lee's scenes in Saudi Arabia, in which she negotiates terms for a loan, endowed her character's dealings with the Saudis in such metaphorical terms:

⁷⁹ Fonda's typed notes (4 January 1980), 'Script Notes by Jane', file 441, box 64, AJP/AMPAS.

LEE

My husband was a very proud man, Your Highness. That is something we had in common. It would have been very painful for him to lose control of his company.

(There, she's said it and it has nothing to do with her!)

ARAB

(He flushes with anger, recognizing what she is doing. He is cold and deliberate.)

Your husband, I have been told, was an astute businessman. I am confident he would have never given financial support to a weakened company without asking for influence over its management. Neither shall we. His company is weak. Your economy is weak. Your national will is weak. We will not depend on you to protect our interests.

(He rises.)

We will control the flow of our money, Mrs. Winters. Not just the flow of our oil.⁸⁰

While not realised in the final film, Fonda's proposals for this exchange between Lee and the Saudi investors reveal her political ambitions for *Rollover*. Lee's quest for control of Winterchem, thematically her desire for 'autonomy', alludes to equivalent themes of Fonda's protagonists in *Klute* and *Comes a Horseman*. It also has allegorical value in suggesting America, like Lee, would have to negotiate its way

⁸⁰ Excerpt from Fonda's proposed rewrites of Saudi sequence (4 January 1980), 'Script Notes by Jane', AJP/AMPAS.

back to economic ‘self control’. Highlighting the fragility of the American economy, the grandest of Fonda and Pakula’s themes thus far, nevertheless became a flashpoint of their collaboration.

The fissures in Fonda and Pakula’s working relationship can be partly attributed to the sheer volume of Fonda’s political identity outside of the film. In developing the narrative of *Rollover*, the stakes had been ratcheted up so high (the potential collapse of America’s banking system!) that Fonda’s rhetoric bordered on agitprop, ushering Pakula to intervene in her political construction of the script. In response to Fonda’s proposed rewrites, Pakula made notes detailing his dissatisfaction with how she had conceived Lee’s characterisation and, in particular, her interaction with the Saudi characters. On the one hand, Pakula felt Fonda’s version lacked finesse: ‘not surprisingly, everything is overt and spelled out in her version and she comes off as foolishly impolite and provocative. Things seem to be said for the benefit of the audience.’⁸¹ Yet Pakula also considered the confrontation between Lee and the Saudi financier in Fonda’s rewrites problematic. His overriding concern was that Lee/Fonda ‘is not [in Saudi Arabia] on a political mission. And the *more* we keep her and her character away from the politics of the situation, the better off we’ll be – because of who Jane is! THIS IS JANE NOT LEE [Original emphasis]!’⁸² Pakula’s consternation over presenting Fonda in overtly political terms was acknowledged by the cautious rendering of these scenes in the final film. Yet Pakula had won the battle and not the war: when *Rollover* approached release in 1981, its media coverage relied heavily on Fonda’s stardom and reputation, and she, in turn, became its political figurehead.

⁸¹ Pakula’s notes (undated), ‘Script Notes by Jane’, AJP/AMPAS.

⁸² Ibid.

Rollover was publicised as the fourth release of IPC Films rather than the third collaboration of Fonda and Pakula. Notably, the film's promotion team did attempt to highlight the Fonda-Pakula connection, with a publicity still (fig. 10) featuring a juxtaposition of Lee Winters, Bree Daniel, and Pakula sandwiched between these

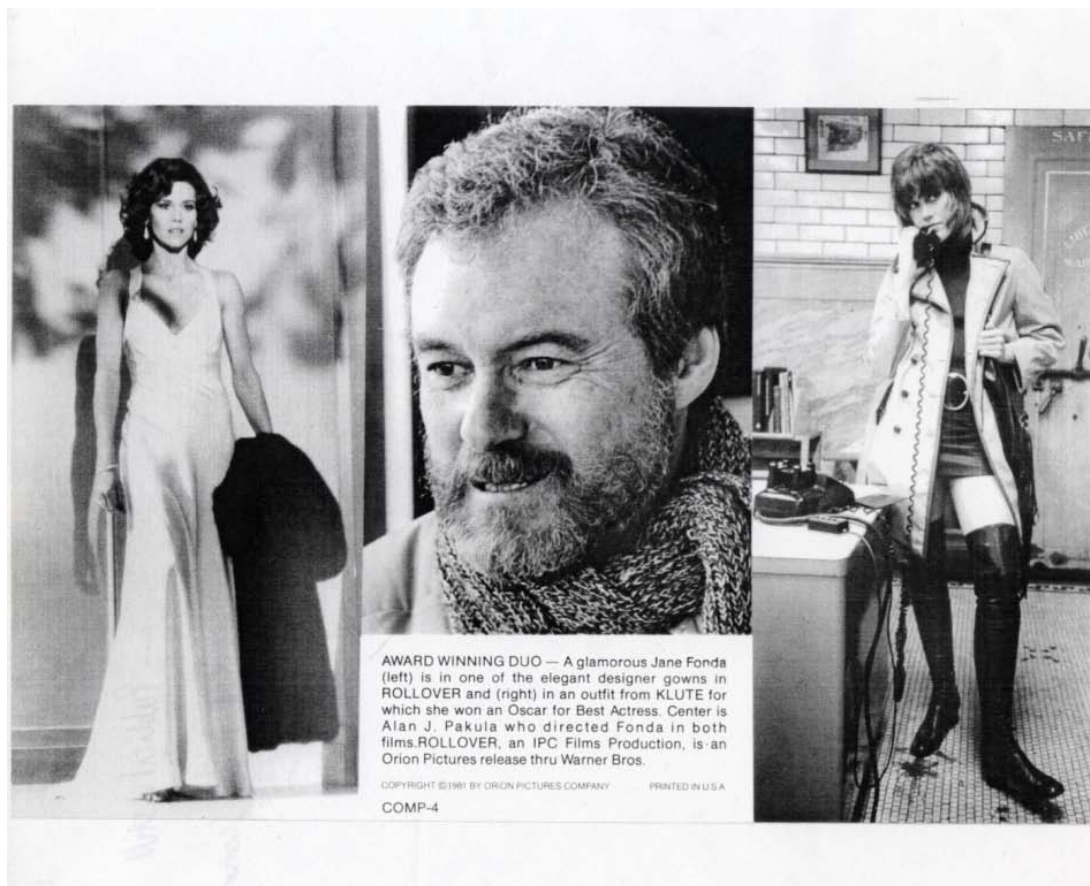


Figure 10. Publicity still for *Rollover*.

characters. This montage alluded to Fonda's acting range (from call girl to society lady) under the versatile direction of Pakula. The implicit passage of time between the

two films (1971 to 1981) also suggested Fonda had orbited back toward playing more glamorous characters of her social class, albeit in a film warning against the very precariousness of American capitalism. This transformation from ‘Bree to Lee’, and its juxtaposition either side of Pakula’s headshot (implying he had a cerebral or creative influence on this process), was the final cohesive artefact of Fonda and Pakula’s collaboration. The emergent pattern of reportage anticipating or coinciding with the film’s release focused instead on *Rollover*’s place within Fonda’s individual career and political identity.

One of the final ironies of *Rollover* is that after the release of the film Pakula remained the more consistently leftist figure when compared to Fonda, despite having disassociated himself from the film’s political overtones. ‘My politics are not the same as Jane’s’, Pakula told the journal *American Film* in November 1981, ‘I’m not a member of Brown described Pakula as ‘a fervent admirer of the Roosevelts and their politics’, and claimed Pakula intended the film to be ‘a realization of his belief that movies could handle mature, complex material of a psychological, social, and political nature’.⁸³

Pakula may well have detached politically from *Rollover* because he, like the press, considered it as an IPC film; an addition to an emerging ‘brand’. The onus of promoting *Rollover* therefore fell to Fonda and locating the film as the next political project of IPC appealed to journalistic sensibilities. William Wolf recounted IPC’s commercial success with ‘message movies’ in *New York* magazine by duly discussing the company’s snowballing profits (each IPC film had outperformed its predecessor);

⁸³ Brown, *Alan J. Pakula*, pp. 357-358.

he faltered when it came to *Rollover*, however, and instead reported Fonda's veiled trepidation: 'I've no idea how people are going to respond to *Rollover*, I think it's an important film and it's by far the most complex subject matter we've tackled or probably ever will tackle.'⁸⁴ *American Film* welcomed the complexity of *Rollover*, suggesting the film's topicality made it 'a thriller with more on its mind than fast cars and faster women'.⁸⁵ In a broader context, *American Film* also identified IPC as reviving 'a Hollywood tradition going back to the thirties and forties social-problem films like *I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang*, *The Grapes of Wrath* [...] films which entertained and sent messages at the same time.'⁸⁶ *Rollover* thus carried the political and financial burden of IPC's prestige over and above Fonda and Pakula's collaboration. The question remains, however, what the implications are for a 'social problem' film that society declines to 'see': this ephemerality of *Rollover* – a film with elaborate political ambitions that failed to reach its audience – contextualises the shifting emphasis in Fonda's mainstream identity during the early-1980s.

Conclusion: the two faces of Fonda

Rollover was Fonda's last film with robust political themes and one of the most poorly received. A survey of nationwide reviews reveals a series of caustic notices criticising at the impenetrable subject matter, lacklustre script and uninspired performances.⁸⁷ After a month of poor business, the film's trailers had been reconfigured to emphasise the romance element in an effort to court female

⁸⁴ Fonda quoted in William Wolf, 'Principles and Profits', *New York* (14 December 1981), p. 90.

⁸⁵ Bygrave and Goodman, 'Message Movies', p. 38.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Examples include Gary Arnold, 'Rollover's Dire Straits', *Washington Post* (11 December 1981), p. C9; Richard Schickel, 'Fiscal Fizzle', *Time* (21 December 1981), p. 80; Stephen Schiff, 'Bloodlessness and Money', *Boston Phoenix* (8 December 1981), pp. 4, 18; Jack Matthews, 'Destined for the Doghouse, *Rollover* Plays Dead', *Detroit Free Press* (13 December 1981), p. 30.

audiences.⁸⁸ This aspect of the film, however, had already come under fire; the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* described the Fonda-Kristofferson romance as akin to ‘eroticism between androids’.⁸⁹ Poring over negative critical responses to *Rollover* therefore restates the obvious. Similarly, to conclude that *Rollover* was merely the stuttering finish to Fonda and Pakula’s three genre films is facile. Rather, the failure of *Rollover* signalled the tail end of a cycle in Fonda’s stardom and identity that had commenced with *Klute*. Whereas in *Klute* Bree’s desire for control and autonomy crystallised the growth of Fonda’s off-screen consciousness, *Rollover* depicts Lee’s acquisition and subsequent loss of power within the context of an economic meltdown. The representation of female ascendancy in *Rollover* is therefore coupled with a doomsday scenario, a motif at odds with Bree’s triumph over her corporately styled killer, Peter Cable, and also an inadvertent warning against the ‘perils’ of endowing women with economic power. Indeed, the final twist of *Rollover* is ironic given the success and visibility Fonda achieved as a businesswoman of the eighties through her fitness empire.

The pre-eminence of *Klute* in the careers of both Fonda and Pakula has, in part, led to *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* being overlooked as anomalous, forgotten ventures. Yet noting the politicised use of genre, which arguably increased in volume with each successive outing, leads to an understanding of how and why Fonda and Pakula worked together, and, indeed, what their collaborative efforts revealed about the parameters of commercial-political cinema. A brief glimpse at each film’s closing scene, for example, reveals a recurrent motif of ‘renaissance’: *Klute*’s

⁸⁸ Gregg Kilday, ‘How Do You Sell a Failing Movie?’, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (10 January 1982), pp. E2-E3, E10.

⁸⁹ Peter Rainer, ‘*Rollover* Cashes in on Sex, Money and Arabs’, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (11 December 1981), p. D6.

vacated apartment, *Comes a Horseman*'s razed ranch house, and *Rollover*'s obsolete trading floor all speak of worlds in transition, but moving forward toward different – if seemingly arduous – futures. In this regard, the commercial failure *Comes a Horseman* and *Rollover* suggested reluctance on the part of the American public to reform established American ideologies, and instead indicated an increasing attachment to nostalgia within cultural forms. Likewise, the shifts in Fonda's persona during 1981, a renaissance of sorts, can be associated with this recourse to nostalgia and are outlined herein.

Identifying the critical and commercial failure of *Rollover* illuminates far more than the film's individual history and the decline of Fonda and Pakula's 'generic experiments'. Indeed, debating whether *Rollover* flopped because of, or in spite of, its political impulses cannot be evaluated convincingly without identifying its competition in the marketplace. Crucially, part of this competition came in the form of Fonda's fifth and most successful IPC production, *On Golden Pond*, which was released within days of *Rollover*'s release.⁹⁰ While not competing in terms of genre, *On Golden Pond* nevertheless offered a rival version of Fonda's stardom – an 'ideological alternative' – that emphasised the personal *in spite of* the political. Indeed, Fonda told *After Dark* magazine in 1982: 'I no longer compete with women; I try to compete with myself.'⁹¹ This statement applied particularly well to her dual presence at the American box office of the time and was a battle she was destined to

⁹⁰ *Rollover* opened on 11 December, 1981. *On Golden Pond* had a limited release on 4 December 1981 and proceeded to general release on 22 January, 1982. Based on the Broadway play by Ernest Thompson, *On Golden Pond* features Norman and Ethel Thayer (Henry Fonda and Katherine Hepburn) as an elderly couple dealing with old age. Chelsea Thayer (Jane Fonda), their daughter, works through her troubled relationship with Norman – a scenario assumed to reflect Jane and Henry's 'off-screen' situation.

⁹¹ Fonda quoted in George Haddad-Garcia, 'The Prime of Ms. Jane Fonda', *After Dark* (January 1982), p. 34.

inevitably both win *and* lose.⁹² The stratospheric commercial success of *On Golden Pond* and the ‘onscreen reconciliation’ with her father Henry were the spoils of Fonda’s victory. In this sense, *Rollover* was significantly the ‘losing’ film: a clear preference had been exerted by American cinemagoers between Fonda in a politicised narrative versus a portrait of Fonda as Henry’s vulnerable, misunderstood daughter.

Fonda embraced radicalism during the early-1970s and self-consciously weaved political themes many of her films during the latter part of the decade. With the coinciding releases of *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond*, contrasting aspects of Fonda’s identity were emphasised yet each were associated with her public persona in different ways. *Rollover* presented Fonda as an astute businesswoman, a ‘mover and shaker’ holding her own in a man’s world. Indeed, Lee’s backstory, which Fonda had largely conceived, echoed her construction of IPC Films: ‘during the time [Lee] was an actress she saw big conglomerates buy up the studios. She had always made her own deals, had her own company and with the new developments she found it necessary to understand how the big companies operate.’⁹³ On the other hand, *On Golden Pond* offered a distinctly sentimental view of Fonda’s stardom. Playing Henry Fonda’s daughter constituted an allusion to the ‘role’ she had played throughout her career and the reconciliation of Henry and Jane as Norman and Chelsea Thayer proved the spectacle of mainstream choice. By having parallel releases for *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond*, IPC represented the schism in Fonda’s identity; the here-and-now of her political activism versus her status as the heir apparent to Henry’s moderate liberal stardom. In this sense, IPC offered American cinemagoers first

⁹² Fonda had, of course, saturated the box office during the 1978/1979 season but the disparity of *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* in every respect took the concept of ‘competing with herself’ at the box office to a higher realm of significance.

⁹³ Letter from Fonda to screenwriter David Shaber (10 November 1980), ‘Outlines’, file 459, box 66, AJP/AMPAS.

refusal over Fonda's contemporaneous political identity – instead they chose the pastoral vision of Fonda family values, *On Golden Pond*.

Chapter 6

Henry Fonda's Daughter:

On Golden Pond (1981) and the Legacy of Stardom

'Looking back, I realize that my only major influence was my father. He had power. Everything was done around his presence, even when he wasn't there.'

Jane Fonda, 'Like Father, Like Daughter',

Ms. (June 1979), p. 46.

'Incapable of communicating with one another directly, the Fondas used the media to voice their personal feelings. [...] They insulted each other, praised each other, baited each other, courted each other – almost as if the only way they could make contact was by this public plea for one another's attention.'

Stephen Farber and Marc Green, *Hollywood Dynasties*

(New York: Delilah Communications, 1984), p. 147.

'Dolly Parton thinks, and so does Kris Kristofferson, that I'm a child. I *know* it's true – enough people tell me – and it has *nothing* to do with the public's perception of me at all. I feel incredibly vulnerable, in a way unformed, naïve, virginal – and want to stay that way.'

Jane Fonda quoted in Aimee Lee Ball, 'The Unofficial

Jane Fonda', *Redbook* (January 1982), p. 30.

Introduction

The parallel releases and contrasting fortunes of *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* signalled a paradigmatic shift in the dimensions of Jane Fonda's political stardom and identity. Based on Ernest Thompson's Tony Award winning Broadway play, *On Golden Pond* became the only IPC production adapted from another medium.¹ It was also anomalous in that it appeared to exist 'outside of' contemporaneous political issues: the film's narrative, like the play, paints a delicate portrait of old age through its two elderly protagonists, Norman and Ethel Thayer, played by Henry Fonda and Katharine Hepburn. Furthermore, Norman's troubled relationship with his daughter, Chelsea (Jane Fonda), is explored candidly, echoing contemporaneous media portraiture of familial tensions between Henry and Jane Fonda. Such biographical dimensions likely proved a factor in securing outstanding box office success for *On Golden Pond*, a somewhat mixed achievement in terms of overall IPC strategy, given that the film was ostensibly bereft of guiding political concerns. Yet it was this very fusion of commercial concerns with biographical allusions that revealed an underlying ideological compromise arising from the political identities of Henry and Jane Fonda being imported into and obfuscated by the melodramatic narrative framework of *On Golden Pond*.² For example, the portrayal of a recuperating father-daughter relationship dovetailed intriguingly with America's Republican renaissance of the early-1980s, which itself was partly predicated through the promotion of 'family values'.³ From this perspective *On Golden Pond* is best analysed as a climactic and

¹ Frances Sternhagen won a Best Actress Tony for the original 1979 stage production.

² Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda will be referred to herein as simply 'Henry' and 'Jane'. 'Fonda', when used, is done so collectively, typically to refer to the broader image of the family's associations.

³ See, for example, Matthew D. Lassiter, 'Inventing Family Values', in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (eds.), *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 13-28.

pivotal ‘media event’ featuring Henry and Jane, as well as a fictitious cinematic work. In particular, the reconciliation of Norman and Chelsea connoted an intergenerational truce, informed by the elliptical journey Jane had taken in relation to her father since her Hollywood debut in 1960. Released in 1981, *On Golden Pond* ostensibly ‘resolved’ the ideological tensions of Jane’s stardom by suggesting that alongside her public political identity, Jane was privately seeking – and winning – paternal approval.

Approaching *On Golden Pond* as both a biographical and ideological artefact of reconciliation necessitates a thoroughgoing analysis of how Jane’s star image developed in the context of, and also in counterpoint to, Henry’s stardom. This will be outlined before embarking on a broader survey of primary sources from 1960 to 1982, bracketing the start of Jane’s Hollywood career and the end of Henry’s, or, put another way, when Henry and Jane were both active in Hollywood at the same time.⁴ As the climax of this period, *On Golden Pond* and its various textual and extra-textual components are duly analysed in some detail. These comprise elements of the production history (including previous attempts at a Fonda family project), the film’s ‘biographical’ publicity patterns, its commercial and industrial success, and, most significantly, the resonance of Jane’s commercial-political stardom in the wake of America’s transition from the idealism of the Carter era to the conservative resurgence heralded by Reagan’s rise to power.

⁴ Henry won the Academy Award for Best Actor in 1982 for his role as Norman Thayer, a few months before his death.

A Star Image is Born: Henry Fonda's Daughter

The Fondas are one of the most successful acting dynasties in Hollywood and have long harboured associations with left-wing politics and culture. These associations start early: four years into Henry's screen career, he appeared as Abraham Lincoln in John Ford's 1939 film, *The Young Mr Lincoln*. In 1940, with America still smarting from the Great Depression, Henry starred as Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, also directed by Ford, for which he earned an Academy Award nomination. This remained his most significant humanitarian role and tied America's perception of 'Henry Fonda' to that of the free-thinking liberal, the advocate of social justice. Conversely, Ford's other major star player, John Wayne, is synonymous with the American right; Wayne's movement (in the form of a swagger) is a crudely recognisable and caricatured symbols of 'tough guy' masculinity. Whereas Wayne's rightist star image is signified through physicality, Henry's stardom is endowed with ostensibly interior and intangible qualities, like 'integrity' or 'conscience', suggesting an attachment to the moral dimensions of his stardom.

Henry's roles have embedded him in America's cinematic mythology: like Wayne, he has long-standing associations with America's signature genre, the Western, yet also played the president – or future president – on three occasions.⁵ In their 1970 essay on *The Young Mr. Lincoln*, the *Cahiers du Cinéma* group identified the film as an ode to liberal capitalist ideology and Henry as its personification.⁶ This

⁵ Henry played fictional presidents in the Cold War thriller *Fail Safe* (1964) and the sci-fi disaster movie *Meteor* (1979), in addition to *The Young Mr. Lincoln*. Dyer makes a similar observation; Dyer, *Stars*, p. 78.

⁶ Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 'John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 223 (1970), reproduced in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods: Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 493-529.

image was further cemented by *Twelve Angry Men* from 1957, which Peter Biskind has argued is more concerned with liberal consensus than justice.⁷ Henry's 'heroic' stardom as exemplified in his Westerns was henceforth subject to revisionism, playing killer-turned-Sheriff Clay Blaisdell in *Warlock* (1959) and an outright villain named simply 'Frank' in Sergio Leone's spaghetti western *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). Heroism of a different kind was required for the disaster movies made during the twilight of his career (*The Swarm* [1978]; *Meteor* [1979]); Henry's image has otherwise remained, in essence, that of Hollywood's liberal elder statesman.

Spanning a forty-six year period between 1935 and 1981, Henry's screen career is noteworthy for its longevity. When considered within this temporal context, the enduring, leftist associations of Henry's films elevate his stardom into the realm of the extraordinary, given the political changes occurring during these years. The durability of Henry's relationship with the American left and the extent to which Hollywood saw fit to represent aspects of left-wing politics throughout his career provided the apparatus for his place within the political imaginary. Accordingly, Henry's stardom both absorbed and exhibited epochal shifts in left-wing ideology. *You Only Live Once* (1937) and *Drums Along the Mohawk* (1939) were populist dramas that pitted Henry's everyman characters against powerful elites; these narratives thus evoked core tenets of New Deal ideology, which aimed to improve the lot of ordinary, hardworking Americans. *The Ox-Bow Incident* (1943) tackled the topic of anti-lynching in a Western format, reworking the genre with a leftist introspective narrative. Latterly, Henry's role in *Twelve Angry Men* is defined by Biskind as the screen surrogate for 'a "cold-war liberal" precisely because he is

⁷ Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 10-20.

engaged in building a bridge to those to the right of himself and bringing those to the left along with him.⁸ In short, Henry's character was a figurehead of the post-war liberal consensus, which subsequently dissipated over the course of the 1960s. Through embodying the left (or left of centre) in its changing forms, Henry's star image maintained political relevance precisely because of an ability to navigate – and manifest – the shifting currents of the times. In some ways Henry's screen stardom quietly anticipated Jane's embrace of image change as political expression, which she constructed both onscreen and off; the emergence and resolution of conflict between Henry and Jane as on and off-screen father and daughter thus enlarged the ideological parameters of their intergenerational stardom.

A recurring paradigm of Jane's star image has been the signifying presence and effect of male influence. Moreover, reportage asserting the sway of Jane's husbands⁹ over her stardom and identity is overarched by an enduring male figure: that of her father, Henry. While such discourse is ostensibly chauvinistic, this should not overshadow the historical and representational issues raised by analysing the familial, intergenerational dynamics of Henry's and Jane's star images. For example, Jane arguably embraced and renegotiated the ideologies espoused by Vadim and Hayden through her image changes; in their most pared down form these were sexual freedom and political activism respectively. Yet Henry's stardom (most notably his embodiment of the American 'liberal conscience') has functioned as an ideological standard bearer for Jane's star image against which the American media has studied her shifts of identity, political or otherwise. The direct and indirect impact of Henry's stardom on that of Jane's thus constitutes an essential topic for understanding her

⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹ Roger Vadim, Tom Hayden and, later, media tycoon Ted Turner (1990-2000).

mainstream standing and how this recuperated after the Vietnam War. Indeed, as Dyer succinctly observes in *Stars*, '[t]hroughout her career, Jane Fonda has been discussed and referred to in terms of her father.'¹⁰

Dyer's discussion of Henry's function within Jane's star image is couched using media commentary asserting her 'inheritance' of his attributes, namely 'physical, cultural and political traits'.¹¹ His summary of Jane's star image's development also reveals the (inescapable) temporal constraints of his work in relation to *On Golden Pond*.¹² For instance, the following passage in *Stars* alludes to Jane's embrace and potentially 'final' renegotiation of Henry's stardom:

Her more recent career [i.e. the years leading up to 1979] has been read as her establishment of herself as her own person. This means that the other elements in her career – sex, acting, politics – are no longer *reduced* to reproduction of or reaction against her father, as they are earlier in her career. However, it may also be argued that her current image consolidates his *values* while at the same time being cut loose of him as a father or in the form of father figures [original emphasis].¹³

In these terms, Jane's films of the late-1970s, particularly the 'social problem' narratives of IPC, were following a transcendent arc that – as with Vadim and Hayden – embraced and renegotiated the influential status 'Henry Fonda' occupied within her

¹⁰ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 77.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 77-81. In particular, Dyer identifies 'Americanness' and left-wing liberalism as the two most important features carried over from Henry to Jane.

¹² Dyer's work was originally published before *On Golden Pond* had been released and therefore had not the opportunity to incorporate its particular – and curiously 'biographical' – contribution to Jane's stardom.

¹³ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 81.

stardom. The question remains, therefore, to what extent the spectacle of reconciliation infusing *On Golden Pond* amounted to an ideological modification of Jane's star image and also what the contemporaneous implications were of 'resolving' the intergenerational differences between Henry's and Jane's respective embodiment of politicised Hollywood stardom. Jane's early stardom, contextualised by Henry's in its pre-politicised form, constitutes the starting point from which to address this question.

In 1960, Jane's Hollywood debut, *Tall Story*, received media coverage that emphasised her relationship with her father (fig. 11). Her appearance on the cover of *Life* arguably had a greater impact than the debut itself. Moreover, Jane's exaggerated 'youthfulness' on this *Life* cover, exemplified by a curiously child-like appearance (she was 22 when the magazine was published) and underlined by the text expecting her to follow 'in her father's footsteps' implied her acting debut was ultimately encompassed by her status as Henry's daughter. Having her initial media representation so tightly bracketed by her father, Jane's subsequent deviation from Henry's image can be considered a corollary of 1960s social change, which manifestly affected those of her demographic profile – young women. Indeed, the tension created within her image by the very nature of her deviation highlights how Jane has inhabited – and seemingly abandoned – a series of 'preferred' mainstream roles (in an ideological sense) regarding her status as a prominent daughter/star/woman of this period. This phenomenon of 'subverting' a previous media identity was signalled through the emergence of *new* layers of media representation in tandem with her film career and deciphers what has commonly been

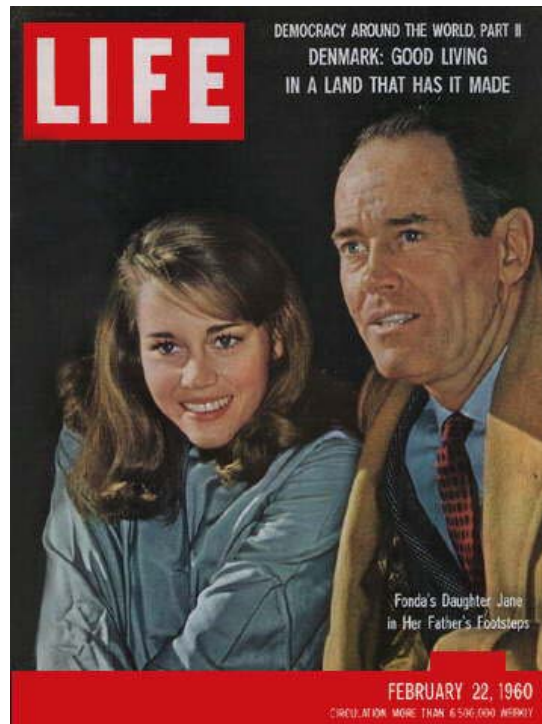


Figure 11. *Life* (22 February 1960).
'Fonda's Daughter Jane in Her Father's Footsteps'.

perceived as Jane's 'fragmentary' image changes. As such, her description of marriage as an 'obsolete institution' in 1961 (discussed in chapter 1) distanced Jane from the 'demure' actress-daughter rendition of her identity heralded by *Life* in 1960, not least because such a description was an implicit critique of her father's publicised string of marriages.

Media profiles published alongside her 'radical' views on marriage reported Jane's desire to carve out her own identity, and were couched in the context of whether she and Henry would work together in Hollywood or on Broadway. In a 1961 interview, Jane claimed it was 'too soon' to work with Henry, declaring 'I'm still

fighting being Henry Fonda's daughter [...] I think I have to fight a little bit more.'¹⁴ The interview in question was promoting the 1962 film *A Walk on the Wild Side*, in which Jane played a Depression-era prostitute named Kitty Twist, a film already noted for its risqué subject matter in the context of the Production Code (see chapter 1). Jane suggested Kitty Twist would be unpalatable to her father but considered the character a career development: 'the kind of part I like to play might not be the kind of girl a father wants his daughter to be. I don't mean bad girls, necessarily, but...well, deeper, more fully exposed than a father likes to think of his daughter being.'¹⁵ Given the film's relationship with the Production Code, Jane's description of Henry's 'disapproval' symbolically aligned him with the film's censors, implying a generation gap centred on morality: 'there would be a constant battle inside me between the daughter and the actress.'¹⁶ More broadly, Kitty Twist was a prototype of Jane's engagement with sexual subjects and characters over the course of the 1960s (culminating with *Barbarella* in 1968) and positioning Henry as a disapproving parental figure provides a crucial context for this phase of her career. Deviation from Henry's image (rather than total abandonment) through the prism of sexual characters was thus an early, recurring motif and demonstrates how Jane's image incorporated and encoded a challenge to her father's moral ideology and the post-war liberal consensus that he was considered to represent.

Themes of sexuality and sensuality typified Jane's star image during the mid-1960s and ostensibly enlarged the parameters of being Henry's daughter. Given the prohibitive production rules in Hollywood, Jane's French films have become the

¹⁴ Jane quoted in Charles Denton, "'Working With Dad Just Won't Work'...Says Jane Fonda', *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner TV Weekly* (6 August 1961), p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

touchstones for this aspect of her career, although her interchange between the French and American film industries actually provided the *frisson* of this process. Despite lacklustre critical notices for the majority of her films, Jane remained active in both Hollywood and France during the mid-1960s. Media interest contemplated her as a potential successor to Brigitte Bardot under Vadim's 'tutelage', the Parisian influence on her identity, and whether this made her any less 'American'. A 1964 issue of *Life* mused this issue with the article 'A U.S. Jane Conquers Paris', showing images of the actress adorned in the latest Parisian fashions counterbalanced with the sub-heading 'but she still likes jeans'.¹⁷ *Time* magazine followed in 1966 with 'Henry Fonda's daughter has established herself on her own as one of the world's most sought after film actresses'. This had been achieved, claimed the magazine, thanks to 'the whole French nation, which welcomed [Jane] three years ago as if she were the D-day fleet. [...] The French saw something extra as well – some exotically sexy combination of Annie Oakley and Sheena, Queen of the Jungle.'¹⁸ Summarising her international presence in 1967, the *New York Times* brought the contradictory elements of Jane's Franco-American stardom into focus:

Ever since de Gaulle threw out NATO and the Johnsons fired their *chef de cuisine*, one of the last remaining ornaments of the Franco-American alliance has been a blonde, blue-eyed bilingual actress named Jane Fonda. [...] Over *here* [...] she sounds like the girl you dated in college, she dresses like the pretty roommate of the girl you dated in college, and most people still think of her as Henry Fonda's daughter. Over *there* [...] she sounds like the girls you eavesdropped on in Parisian cafés, she undresses like Brigitte Bardot, and

¹⁷ Author uncredited, 'A U.S. Jane Conquers Paris', *Life* (10 January 1964), JFCC/AMPAS.

¹⁸ Author uncredited, 'The Blonde Black Panther', *Time* (9 September 1966), p. 46.

everyone knows her as the latest wife [...] of Roger Vadim [original emphasis].¹⁹

For the American media, then, Jane's transnational stardom signified less a breach in being 'Henry's daughter' than more the introduction of a French surrogate figure in the form of Vadim. As Dyer states, 'emphasis on the problematic, "psychological" aspects of Fonda's relation to her father also leads in the [star] image to an insistence on men as father figures in her life.'²⁰ Notably, the journalistic address to the contemporaneous reader of the article quoted above is also implicitly from 'man to man'.

The duality of Jane's stardom at home and abroad was sensationally combined in her most high profile sexual film, *Barbarella* (1968). Now known primarily as a 'Jane Fonda' film, *Barbarella* was a Franco-Italian co-production and so originally reached America as a European import. The film received pre-publicity based around Jane's stardom, with a March issue of *Life* magazine announcing 'Fonda's Little Girl Jane as a Futuristic Space Traveler in the Movie *Barbarella*' (fig. 12). This cover portrait couches the film within the context of Jane's stardom, which, in turn, is positioned in the broader context of Henry's stardom by the cover text. An implicit 'rank' is thus apportioned to the layers of male influence over Jane's stardom; specifically, no mention is made of Vadim on the cover, and given the previous issue featuring Henry and Jane in 1960, *Life* had forged a curious continuity between father and daughter that arguably 'domesticated' Jane's sex symbol status for American

¹⁹ Gerald Jonas, 'Here's What Happened to Baby Jane', *New York Times* (22 January 1967), p. 91.

²⁰ Dyer, *Stars*, p. 80.

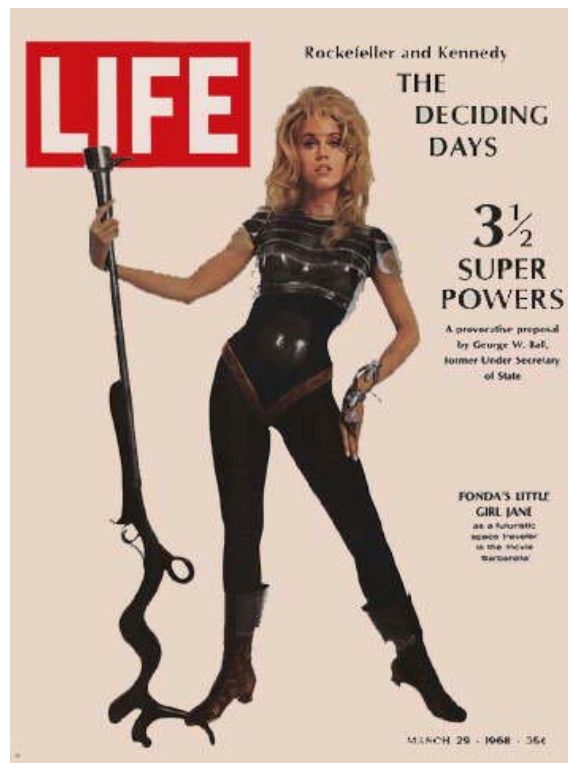


Figure 12. *Life* (29 March 1968).

audiences. The blank/white background heightens focus on Jane's provocative physicality and also obfuscates any sense of scale, reinforcing the diminutive terms ('little girl') in which Jane is described and thus represented. The presence of politically themed headlines ('3½ Super Powers') coupled with Jane's glazed expression also codes the blank background as representing contemporaneous chauvinistic responses to her image, that of an empty-headed star; indeed, the 'Rockefeller and Kennedy' text is – quite literally – over her head. Film scholar Susan McLeland considers Jane to be 'staring defiantly – but seductively' on this cover of *Life*.²¹ The former quality is a somewhat optimistic assertion given the composition

²¹ McLeland, 'Barbarella Goes Radical', p. 234.

and historical context of this cover, which instead offers a visual and textual example of how Jane and political affairs were still perceived to exist in decidedly different worlds.

The *Life* cover portrait of Jane-as-Barbarella in these terms indicates how the ‘eroticised’ phase of her career was a provocative, but not necessarily irreconcilable, aspect of being ‘Henry’s daughter’. Moreover, the accompanying profile by Thomas Thompson revealed the tensions manifesting through Jane’s sexualised stardom insofar as it interspersed coverage of *Barbarella* and Vadim’s influence as ‘sensational’ aspects of her larger life history. McLeland summarises the tone of this article with her observation ‘he never appears in person in this particular article, [but] Henry Fonda haunts Thompson’s description of Jane Fonda and her lifestyle’.²² This is crucial, as Thompson suggests Jane’s films and lifestyle are interchangeable when he discusses a nude photograph of Jane on an Italian beach: ‘the beach setting is not from any particular Jane Fonda movie – though it could have been. It does point up the direction her acting career has been taking of late and is therefore a classic example not only of the generation gap but also, in Jane’s and Henry’s case, of its cause, effect, solution and *rapprochement*’.²³ The height of Jane’s sex symbol years was thus incorporated into narrative of redemption; the life and times of Henry’s ‘wayward daughter’. The question remained, though, to what extent the *political* generation gap – shortly to envelop Henry and Jane, and already affecting the nation at large – would frustrate Jane’s attempts at forging an identity apart from both Hollywood and her father.

²² Ibid.

²³ Thomas Thompson, ‘A Place in the Sun All Her Own’, *Life* (29 March 1968), p. 68.

By the late-1960s, Jane and Peter Fonda, like Henry, had achieved international stardom. The impact of *Easy Rider* (1969) particularly suggested Hollywood was enduring fundamental changes and that Peter could be Henry's 'successor'; the New Hollywood had found a new social conscience, albeit counter-cultural. Divisions within the Fonda family appealed to American journalists during the 1960s and each member duly obliged by casting familial judgements into the media mire. Yet noting the tendency of just that is important; this dysfunctional Hollywood family was still an American family according to the press, which constructed the Fondas as embodying facets of national identity, whereby Henry stood for mainstream liberal morality and Peter and Jane were envoys of the contemporaneous sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll culture. Representing them as individuals exhibiting differences that could equally be united by familial bonds was thus exercised at key points. *Time* magazine, for example, in its February 1970 article and interview entitled 'The Flying Fondas and How They Grew', asked Henry, Peter and Jane the collective question of whether they recognised themselves as 'the first family of American cinema.'²⁴ Though eliciting a muted response, this inquiry revealed an implicit desire for reunification: America 'looking in' on a famous (and infamously) dysfunctional clan after the upheaval of the 1960s.

The *Time* article accorded the Fondas iconic status as a family and was an outgrowth of previous profiles contemplating Hollywood stardom across generations. A strand of less salacious journalism stressing the dynastic qualities of the Fondas accompanied Jane's perceived move away from Henry's image during the 1960s. This started innocuously; in 1961, the *New York Times* noted the rise of sons and daughters

²⁴ Stefan Kanfer and Jay Cocks, 'The Flying Fondas and How They Grew', *Time* (16 February 1970), p. 56.

from the Mills, Ladd, and Fonda families, amongst others, and contemplated: ‘Stars who have glittered on the stage and screen for decades are shining in a new way today – through their children. [...] Will any of them achieve their parents’ stature?’²⁵ In February 1962, *Time* magazine profiled the Fonda children specifically alongside their father, noting physical similarities and the potential for future career disputes. Henry, who was holding firm within Hollywood’s upper ranks at the time, responded with a jovial aside: ‘I’m not so worried about Jane, but what about Peter? The day will probably come when he’ll be stealing roles away from me.’²⁶ In its 1970 article, *Time* thus revisited this theme by acknowledging the impact the Fonda children were having on the Fonda ‘name’ through their Hollywood careers. The cover featured article and interview with the family suggested each member had reached their zenith in a ‘doomed’ role: *Mister Roberts* (1955), *Easy Rider* and *They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?* (both 1969) all end with the protagonist’s death.²⁷ Given the latter two films are prime examples of the New Hollywood period, Henry’s image was implicitly ‘updated’ through his inclusion in this unofficial, ‘doomed’ Fonda trilogy. His children, moreover, were representing this cinematic, generational paradigm shift between ‘Old’ and New Hollywood through their evolving stardom. This phenomenon also denoted Jane’s identity was poised – akin to the times – for significant transformation:

You must admit my father, with the kind of image he had, produced peculiar offshoots. He’s always been the all-American liberal democratic good solid citizen – look at the presidents and senators he’s played – and here his son is, a

²⁵ Author uncredited, ‘Acting: It’s All in the Family’, *New York Times* (29 January 1961), p. 25

²⁶ Henry quoted in author uncredited, ‘Springtime for Henry’, *Time* (16 February 1962), p. 53.

²⁷ Kanfer and Cocks, ‘The Flying Fondas’, p. 53.

pot-smoking hippie, whatever that means, and his daughter – I don't know *what* she is [original emphasis]!²⁸

Rejection and reconciliation

As Jane's star persona became associated with radicalism during the 1970s, a relationship concurrently emerged between the perceived disapproval of her father and that of the mainstream media. *Time* magazine had positioned the Fondas as cinematic ambassadors of the zeitgeist, particularly Peter whose ill-fated role of Captain America in *Easy Rider* represented counter-cultural anxiety about conservative elements within American society. It is notable, therefore, that focus should shift abruptly to Jane as the most contentious 'Fonda' and persist over the course of the coming decade. Indeed, at the close of the 1960s, Jane's stardom briefly followed a trajectory affiliated with Henry's liberal image: she returned from France to America with Vadim and her role in the Depression-set *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* harboured allusions to the dispossessed characters of *The Grapes of Wrath*. A 1969 *Redbook* article also implied that Jane and Vadim were more 'conventional' than their lifestyle outwardly suggested; Henry was interviewed and his verdict treated as the first and last word on the matter: 'We're very close now. The closest we've ever been. If you've done your homework, you know there was a period when we were...estranged.'²⁹ Jane and Henry's 'closeness' implied that, moral differences aside ('Well, I still haven't seen *Barbarella*, so I can't comment on that'),³⁰ her return home on the arm of Vadim at the close of the 1960s could be reconciled as simply

²⁸ Jane quoted in Rex Reed, 'Jane: "Everyone Expected Me to Fall on my Face"', *New York Times* (25 January 1970), p. 87.

²⁹ Henry quoted in Martha Weinman Lear, 'Whatever Happened to Mr. Fonda's Baby Jane?', *Redbook* (August 1969), p. 124.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

leading a 'sensational' Hollywood lifestyle. Shortly after Jane's return to America, however, her marriage collapsed and she embarked on her political 'awakening' during the early-1970s.

Understanding the media's role within Jane's politicisation must initially identify that her journey was a conspicuous deviation from the cinema screen. Whereas Peter had 'rebelled' on celluloid with *Easy Rider*, Jane's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* constituted less of a radical departure. Entertainment journalism within Jane's political period also confirmed her radicalisation had not been realised cinematically, given her contradictory but revealing statements: 'I'd like to do a heavy political movie, but I haven't found one', and 'my work isn't the place to give messages, it's hard enough to find a good movie to do'.³¹ While *Klute* in 1971 engaged her feminist concerns, the other aspects of Jane's political identity, such as her involvement with the Black Panthers, were played out through the portals of American television news and print media. Through her radical activism and its media representation, Jane was ostensibly pitted against mainstream American society and, crucially, her father, whose judgement was magnified by commentary on her political activities. Jane's apparent ambivalence about delivering an equivalent 'landmark' film to Peter's *Easy Rider* and Henry's *Grapes of Wrath* (amongst others) therefore left the construction of her political identity to the media by proxy, a process she neither solicited nor resisted given the tacit representation of her politicisation as a media 'story' unto itself. As discussed, attaching Henry's paternal judgement onto these profiles was symptomatic of a media trend established in the 1960s; during the early-

³¹ Jane quoted in Ann Guerin, 'Jane Fonda Takes on the World', *Show* (March 1971), pp. 43-48.

1970s, journalistic angles incorporated both moral and political judgements of Jane's stardom.

Media asserting divisions between Jane's and Henry's ideological positions on topical issues took various forms. Marilyn Beck's column in *Citizen News* proclaimed: 'regardless of what her daddy thinks, Jane Fonda plans to keep on protest marching. And she wishes Daddy Hank would keep his opinions to himself!'³² Less crude discussed how Jane's relationship with Henry had deteriorated because of their divergent views on Vietnam, with Henry's liberal centrist view of foreign policy differing from Jane's radical anti-war stance. This denoted an entrenched political estrangement: 'you don't have a father like that without being influenced or impressed. [...] I respect him a lot, and for a while I was completely dominated by him. It's very hard for me to accept the fact that he doesn't agree with me. He really doesn't. And what saddens me most is that there's no possibility for a dialogue.'³³ It is also revealing that an unguarded attack on Jane's political identity should be launched by *Life* magazine in April 1971, eleven years after it introduced her to the nation, smiling placidly at her father's side in 1960. John Froom's *Life* profile dismissed Jane's activism and portrayed her as a humourless, hysterical amateur adrift in a sea of causes:

Henry Fonda's actress daughter has transformed herself into a relentlessly verbal activist. Headlines proclaim her involvement in antiwar shows for servicemen, in demonstrations on behalf of welfare clients and California farm workers and Indians. She makes speeches for women's rights and GI rights

³² Marilyn Beck, 'Fonda to Continue Protest Marching', *Citizen News* (9 June 1970), JFCC/AMPAS.

³³ Jane quoted in Oriana Fallaci, 'Jane Fonda: "I'm Coming Into Focus"', *McCall's* (February 1971), pp. 148-149.

and Black Panther rights. She appears on TV talk shows, and if she turns on many of the young she turns off a great many other citizens.³⁴

Written well in advance of Jane's visit to North Vietnam, this passage highlighted the boundaries of 'acceptable' stardom, gender, and 'familial heritage' Jane had already breached.

The critique of Jane's political identity in Frook's piece was encoded with the values of America's 'silent majority' and revealed two instincts. Firstly, the sheer scale of Jane's media presence was alluded to in terms that asserted its incessant vocal dimensions (making speeches, TV talks shows; the article's 'Nag, Nag, Nag' title) underlining that she had, after all, 'transformed herself into a relentlessly verbal activist'.³⁵ Secondly, Frook simultaneously offered moral criteria by which her political actions could be implicitly discredited; Jane's rocky marital status is mentioned ('her estranged husband [Vadim]'), her status within the Fonda family is cited reductively ('Henry Fonda's actress daughter'), and the cover story implies a suspect relationship with drugs ('Jane Fonda, pusher of causes'). The portrait of Fonda as a wayward 'child' is particularly striking, given Frook's assertion 'if she turns on many of the young she turns off a great many other citizens'. This invocation of 'silent majority' ideology was an exercise in character assassination yet Henry's silence, not rushing to the defence of his daughter, constituted the most damaging judgement: in this regard, Frook's portrait of the generation gap ran directly through the Fonda family.

³⁴ John Frook, 'Nag, Nag, Nag! Jane Fonda Has Become a Nonstop Activist', *Life* (23 April 1971), p. 51.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

The *Life* magazine sources discussed thus far trace the trajectory of isolation underpinning Jane's star image in relation to Henry, not least because the magazine constituted a portal into mainstream American values. This juxtaposition of Jane's three cover appearances (fig. 13) is also a striking depiction of her shifting public image leading up to and including her politicisation. The gradual fading out of Henry's presence demonstrated here; from within the frame (1960), to being referred to in text (1968), to total absence; is a pattern that raises crucial issues for Jane's political period. Firstly, there is the possibility that Jane had wrestled free of being Henry's daughter by adopting a radical stance on political issues and projecting an image that underlined this, his absence from the frame being of paramount significance. Yet Henry's absence simultaneously implies abandonment and a disavowal of Jane's political identity that closes ranks with the post-war liberal establishment, whom considered young radicals and the New Left beyond the political pale. Both readings form a shared truth and can be applied to the looming crescendo of Jane's politicisation: her 1972 journey to North Vietnam and the marginalisation that followed.

Jane's positioning on the fringes of American politics, yet still heavily surveyed by the mainstream media, was a process of representation comprising multiple factors. Aside from her own agency as an individual, Jane was subject to the media's biases, which included vicarious judgement of her action through the eyes of her father. As Henry's presence (and, by implication, his support) became less and less visible, Jane's adversarial stance against Nixon and his Vietnam policies absorbed dimensions of ideological 'rebellion' that became an inflated version of her



Figure 13. *Life* covers from 1960, 1968 and 23 April 1971.

division with her father; indeed, the representation of the anti-war movement as primarily a youth phenomenon consolidated this process. Given aforementioned media patterns emphasising the influence of her father or husbands as ‘father figures’ in Jane’s stardom, it follows that father figures could take on threatening forms within her representation and Nixon’s status as the President constitutes an underexplored version of this configuration. The isolation and vilification of ‘Hanoi Jane’ and the collapse of Fonda’s mainstream appeal after her North Vietnam visit thus depended on a chorus of disapproval led by the implicitly ‘paternal’ power figures of the nation, having inadvertently been endorsed by Henry’s silence and absence. The strength of this observation, however, must be explored using the period following Jane’s fall from mainstream favour: her ‘recuperation’ was effected in relation to the fall of President Nixon and his political allies and also, crucially, through the perceived reconciliation with her father and his recognisable, ‘patriotic’ political kudos. McLeland has observed that ‘the crowning blow in the war of containment against Fonda came in her reconciliation with Henry Fonda – a settlement that could be

considered to bridge the previous decade's generational conflict'.³⁶ Using a *New York Times* article from August 1973, McLeland cites Henry's oral defence of his daughter: 'I've not said much about Jane before and I resent people who expect me to denounce her...[h]ers is not my way of life, and hers is not too often my exact way of thinking. But I love her, I respect her right to say what she says and she and her husband are obviously deeply in love.'³⁷ Henry's reaffirmed association with Jane's identity suggested that she had, as McLeland puts it, 'entered a stage that was more easily contained by patriarchal hegemony',³⁸ yet Jane had survived her 'stand-off' with President Nixon, which complicates McLeland's notion of straightforward 'containment'. Rather, reconciliation with Henry couched her actions within the recurring themes of maverick liberalism defining the Fondas' collective 'life story'.

In the first chapter of this thesis, it was stated that President Nixon's immersion in the Watergate scandal vindicated Jane's stance against his prolongation of the Vietnam War. Accordingly, Henry's 'role' within this process requires exploration. The 'inheritance' theme Dyer identifies can thus be applied to what is, essentially, Jane's first stage of recuperation. Following her Hanoi visit and the POW controversy the need to provide conventional rationalisation of her actions during her radical period became a pressing issue. Realigning the Fonda family and reaffirming its political reputation therefore came into force once again in the media.

After a series of fleeting magazine and newspaper articles noting her political activities derisively, sustained media interest in Jane's stardom and activism reignited as Watergate approached its climax. Martin Kasindorf's in-depth 1974 profile in the

³⁶ McLeland, 'Barbarella Goes Radical', pp. 246-247.

³⁷ Henry quoted in *ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

New York Times Magazine demonstrated this shift in the palatability of Jane's media presence. Whereas Watergate signified a Presidency at the end of its life, Jane was depicted as reconciling with hers, especially its familial foundations. Having married Tom Hayden in January 1973, Jane was no longer the volatile, 'estranged wife' of Vadim and Henry's emergence as a defender of Jane's identity reaffirmed her status as his beloved but 'headstrong' daughter. The title of Kasindorf's profile 'Fonda: A Person of Many Parts' also alluded implicitly to one of Henry's contributory quotes: 'well, [Jane's] life has taken a different turn [...] she has other commitments now. How long they will remain the priority commitments, I don't know.'³⁹ Kasindorf quoted Steve Jaffe, Jane's public relations man, with a statement exhibiting a similarly capricious theme: 'I had to rewrite her biography every two months.'⁴⁰ The 'potential' for change in Jane's image, so vividly enacted by her transformation from Barbarella to 'Hanoi Jane', therefore underwrote her mainstream repositioning after North Vietnam and provided the infrastructure supporting the public reconciliation of Henry and Jane.

If discord between Henry and Jane can be partially attributed to the ideological biases of the American media then a similar process should be observed of how father and daughter were perceived to reconcile. The difference between each scenario, however, was that Jane had begun to deal with the media as a pragmatist rather than a polemicist, enhanced by the willingness to portray her as a recuperated radical. Links were reaffirmed between Jane and Henry in a number of ways, both telegraphed by and made independently of the stars themselves. The principal reaffirmation was Jane's desire to make Hollywood films again, expressly using her political agenda as

³⁹ Henry Fonda quoted in Martin Kasindorf, 'Fonda: A Person of Many Parts', *New York Times Magazine* (3 February 1974), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Steve Jaffe quoted in Kasindorf, 'Person of Many Parts', p.16.

an ideological compass and canvas. These films, discussed at length throughout this thesis, have been termed ‘commercial-political’ cinema given that both strategies were explicitly cited by all concerned. Yet IPC Films also evoked the socially conscious cinema that gave Henry his enduring liberal image. It is intriguing, therefore, that such an ostensibly apolitical project as *On Golden Pond* should be Henry’s last film and the last produced by IPC, as if combining these two elements somehow yielded an intimate melodrama rather than a politicised narrative. Indeed, charting the development history of what would ultimately become *On Golden Pond* reveals a transformative process of epic proportions: from rejection to reconciliation, from ‘Hanoi Jane’ to Henry’s daughter, from the 1970s to the 1980s.

Revolution and reunion

Recounting the production history of *On Golden Pond* traces a thread from the initial stages of Jane and Henry’s reconciliation, when a markedly different film project was in its earliest stages of development. Set during the American Revolution, this unrealised feature remained structured around casting the Fonda family and included a significant role for Peter, as well as Henry and Jane. The project was first alluded to in Kasindorf’s 1974 profile, a piece of journalism signalling the commencement of Jane’s recuperation in manifold ways: ‘Peter Fonda has an option on a Howard Fast novel about Valley Forge and is thinking of starring the three fabulous Fondas in a movie on the subject. Jane is particularly attracted to the idea of films illuminating the Revolution as the national bicentennial approaches.’⁴¹ Notably, then, the project was first associated with Peter before being discussed as Jane’s brainchild, echoing the

⁴¹ Kasindorf, ‘Person of Many Parts’, p. 24.

shift in media focus from Peter's stardom to Jane's at the start of the 1970s. Indeed, given IPC Films constituted Jane's attempt at making Hollywood features that were simultaneously political and commercial, it is fitting that this, one of its earliest projects in development, should consolidate those political and commercial dimensions purely through assembling the Fonda 'family values' within a tale of American's revolutionary past.

Media discussion of the American Revolution picture persisted until the late-1970s and this longevity suggests Jane's optioning of *On Golden Pond* at the close of the decade was symptomatic of her desire to produce, essentially, a Fonda family movie.⁴² Yet in a 1975 interview with *Cinéaste*, Jane maintained an emphasis on the film's political dimensions and, moreover, suggested Peter's original source material had not reflected the Fonda spirit:

I knew my brother had been wanting [*sic*] to do a film based on Howard Fast's *Conceived in Liberty*. That's a very interesting book, but it has some problems. It doesn't deal with racism and it doesn't deal with the role of blacks in the American Revolution. Some blacks fought at Bunker Hill and others fought with the British. But reading that book and other books by Fast and various authors, I began to realize how little I knew about the American Revolution. The realities, the details, are quite complex, subtle and fascinating. My father, brother and I decided to do a film together. We asked Staughton Lynd [a prominent left-wing activist and historian] to do the historical research. [...]

We wanted to show the revolution from the point of view of working people,

⁴² The closest the Fondas had come to a 'family' picture was the gothic trio of shorts collectively titled *Spirits of the Dead* (1968), the first segment of which starred Jane and Peter Fonda directed by Vadim.

not just famous battles and famous names. Why did the common people eventually come to support the idea of revolution?⁴³

In these terms, the American Revolution picture was an ambitious, leftist portrait of the nation's origins that drew on the Fonda 'liberal conscience'. Henry's projected role, an 'intellectual cobbler,' was hinted to be the central protagonist and the film's moral and political framework could therefore be structured by his representation. As an IPC production, though, the film's intended message remained within the orbit of Jane's politics and her interview with the ideologically aligned journal *Cinéaste* revealed this:

I have come to understand that revolution is a process. We are taught in America to view it as an event. We fought it and we won it and isn't that wonderful! In our film we want to try to view our history as a dialectical process in which many progressive things were won for some people but not for all. In that process there were massacres and the seeds of American imperialism were sown.⁴⁴

The mix of stardom, political ideology, and historical issues in the revolution picture inferred its importance for IPC Films. As the company's most publicised 'unrealised' project, its protracted development process offers insights into the shifting political function of her company and the resonance of her stardom arising from its promulgation.

⁴³ Jane quoted in Dan Georgakas, 'I Prefer Films that Strengthen People: An Interview with Jane Fonda', *Cinéaste* (Summer 1975), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

IPC's commercial-political strategies channelled Jane's hopes for the American Revolution picture outward to manifest within other aspects of her stardom and politics. By 1976 the project assumed the working title *A House Divided* and was noted in national and trade articles well into 1977, with *Variety* reporting the Fonda trio had concurrently turned down a remake of *The Grapes of Wrath*.⁴⁵ Jane also inserted references to the film into politically themed articles. In a 1976 interview with *The Advocate*, a magazine targeted at gay readers, she stressed the architects of the American Revolution were essentially 'rebels', and asserted that her husband's 1976 campaign for the Senate was comparably 'humanist'.⁴⁶ Feminist readers encountered references to *A House Divided* in *Ms.* magazine in October 1977. The article reported rather austere that the film 'will star the three Fondas and show that whatever else the American Revolution achieved, it did nothing for women'.⁴⁷ Yet the appeal of *A House Divided* was intimated through its positioning alongside IPC's soon-to-be landmark film *Coming Home*, then in pre-production: 'both [films] will attempt to show the process of change, the ways in which ordinary people can achieve liberation.'⁴⁸ Representing 'change', a theme bound up with Jane's stardom, was an early feature of IPC's narratives and, indeed, her overall recuperation.

A renewed emphasis on Jane's reconciliation with Henry emerged in the mainstream press when it looked increasingly unlikely that *A House Divided* would ever be produced. This coincided with her 'comeback' films, *Fun with Dick and Jane* and *Julia*. Jane recounted in the *Pittsburgh Press* in October 1977 how her father had

⁴⁵ Joseph McBride, 'Fonda Clan Wants to Team in Revolutionary War Picture', *Variety* (13 January 1976), JFCC/AMPAS. See also John M. Wilson, 'Jane Fonda's Happy Heist', *New York Times* (11 April 1976), pp. 1, 19; Joseph Gelmis, 'A Rebel Returns With a Nice Comic Touch', *Newsday* (13 February 1977), pp. 9, 14.

⁴⁶ Richard Kelly, 'Interview: Jane Fonda', *The Advocate* (2 June 1976), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁷ Margaret Drabble, 'Her Own Woman at Last?', *Ms.* (October 1977), p. 88.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

begun to understand her politicisation during the early-1970s but his concerns had not been allayed until she ‘married Tom Hayden’.⁴⁹ Similarly, Jane told the appropriately named *Family Weekly* the following year, ‘It took two or three years after I surfaced in the antiwar movement for my father to realize that this was not some sort of Oedipal reaction or dilettante phase I was passing through – that I had gone through a very deep and permanent political change in my life.’⁵⁰ References to Henry’s opinion in these articles reveal the emphasis placed upon his paternal approval. Indeed, Jane’s inheritance of Henry’s ‘patriotic’ qualities and an endorsement of the nation at large when she returned to Hollywood was correlated implicitly in the *Philadelphia Daily News*: ‘she’s always been “one of us”. An All-American girl. Henry’s girl – and the recipient of his Midwestern looks and naturalness and such rustic virtues as sincerity, honesty and integrity.’⁵¹

Media interest in Jane and Henry’s relationship revealed that films themselves had become a mechanism in how they reconciled with one another. For example, *Newsweek* suggested in 1977, ‘she’s very much her father’s child. It was only when she reached her own maturity that she realized that her father in his way had made some of the same kind of movies that she wants to make. It was only in the late ’60s that she first saw *The Grapes of Wrath*, which Henry Fonda made with John Ford when she was just 2 years old.’⁵² This allusion to Jane ‘discovering’ Henry as Tom Joad, in a guise that America had already embraced, implied their differences could be resolved within the healing medium of celluloid. This concept would be realised

⁴⁹ Jane quoted in Edward L. Blank, ‘Activist Actress Jane More Fervent Than Ever’, *Pittsburgh Press* (19 October 1977), p. B16.

⁵⁰ Jane quoted in Joseph N. Bell, ‘Jane Fonda at 40: Mother, Housewife, Activist, Superstar’, *Family Weekly* (12 March 1978), p. 6.

⁵¹ Joe Baltake, ‘Jane Fonda: Finished Woman’, *Philadelphia Daily News* (14 October 1977), p. 45.

⁵² Jack Kroll, ‘Hollywood’s New Heroines’, *Newsweek* (10 October 1977), p. 87.

within the reconciliatory scenes of *On Golden Pond*. Making ‘the same kind of movies’, a phrase *Newsweek* had employed to link IPC Films to a Fonda family tradition rather than treating it as an individual enterprise, was also tantamount to ideological reconciliation in Hollywood terms. For cautious mainstream observers this was depicted as a shared impulse whereby father inspired daughter and thus implicitly set the boundaries of her cinematic inheritance.

The process of father and daughter reconciling *through* the media foreshadowed the appeal of *On Golden Pond*. Instances of this were subtle and provided a context for the scenes of reconciliation that followed on celluloid. An interview with *Playgirl* magazine in April 1979, published when Jane’s commercial and political identities were tightly fused (the accident at Three Mile Island coinciding with the March 1979 release of *The China Syndrome* is a case in point), included questions relating to her father and thus sought to explore the personal dimensions of her success. In particular, Jane suggested the understanding and intimacy between herself and Henry existed in a media context or not at all: ‘I’ve even learned to love the things that are strange about him, like how he can say things that are extremely warm and intimate to the press about me, but he won’t say them to me directly.’⁵³ Keen to portray this approach to emotional expression in a positive light, Jane suggested Henry’s reticence was symptomatic of their shared fame: ‘It happens to famous people sometimes.’⁵⁴ *On Golden Pond* (the stage production of which had opened on Broadway just weeks before Jane gave her *Playgirl* interview) would provide an opportunity for Henry and Jane to reconcile their differences through the surrogates of their characters and their onscreen personas. In large part, intimacy

⁵³ Jane quoted in Celeste Fremon, ‘Jane Fonda: An Intimate Conversation with the Lady Behind the Legend’, *Playgirl* (April 1979), p. 110.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

between Jane and Henry needed the media to prove its existence – it had to be ‘read’ and ‘seen’, as well as felt.

***On Golden Pond*: Hollywood family values**

The apolitical source material and narrative structure of *On Golden Pond* constituted a point of divergence rather than the final destination of IPC Films. Indeed, the parallel releases of *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* revealed schisms in both the *modus operandi* of IPC Films and Jane’s established commercial-political stardom. Such elements were, hitherto, mutually reinforcing aspects of her identity and career, noted conjunctively as the means by which cinematic projects engaged strategic issues. Jane and Bruce Gilbert, her producing partner, would decide to tackle a political issue and then search for a writer to develop the idea; *Coming Home*, *The China Syndrome*, *Nine to Five* and the ill-fated *Rollover* had all been cultivated using this approach. In contrast, *On Golden Pond* was an adapted creative work to which the rights were purchased and, moreover, the narrative disallowed explicit political content. This shift in IPC’s developmental methods signalled the overall diffusion of Jane’s activism in relation to her films and stardom. Whereas politicisation in the early-1970s witnessed the fragmentation of her mainstream appeal (and its near collapse after her visit to Hanoi), by the early-1980s, Jane’s mainstream appeal had actually been consolidated through compartmentalising the political aspects of her identity. Her portrayal of a vulnerable daughter in the pastoral setting of *On Golden Pond*, apparently ensconced within a privileged verisimilar realm, exemplified Jane’s recuperative trajectory from ‘Hanoi Jane’ to Henry’s daughter.

Publicity anticipating the release of *On Golden Pond* adopted a biographical angle that underplayed its dearth of political subject matter. Though noted in tandem with *Rollover*, journalists exhibited a collective nonchalance regarding the glaring disparity between the two films. Whereas Jane's transition from sex symbol to radical had previously attracted incredulity in the media, lurching from the apocalyptic vision of global power in *Rollover* to the quasi-biographical *On Golden Pond* was considered proof of her versatility and political mellowing. 'It has been a turbulent coming of age', pronounced Phyllis Stewart in her *Newsday* article, which asserted *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* were indicative of Jane having 'matured into an actress of depth and range who no longer is in conflict about her dual careers as "movie star" and activist'.⁵⁵ *Newsday* also noted the break in the developmental model of IPC as demonstrated by *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond*, yet reported Jane's classification of the latter as 'a present to my father.'⁵⁶

Other media interest in the film's familial elements further obscured Jane's political stardom by emphasising her Hollywood lineage. *Vogue*, for example, described filming *On Golden Pond* as a process that 'gave Miss Fonda the chance to become closer to her father, with whom she had never worked professionally'.⁵⁷ This denoted Jane's star persona was on a cyclical path toward reunion with Henry, facilitated, crucially, by a visual mass-medium. Introduced to America as 'Henry's daughter' by *Life* magazine in 1960, this 'idyllic' portrait of Henry and Jane had been ostensibly undermined by the sexual and political movements of the '60s and '70s that Jane's stardom had enacted and represented. Media anticipation of *On Golden Pond*

⁵⁵ Phyllis Stewart, 'At Ease in a Mix of Roles: Actress/Activist Jane Fonda Seems to Have Resolved the Conflicts of Her Stormy Past', *Newsday* (13 December 1981), p. 4.

⁵⁶ Jane quoted in Stewart, 'At Ease in a Mix of Roles', p. 5.

⁵⁷ Corby Kummer, 'Yankee Grit: *On Golden Pond*', *Vogue* (November 1981), p. 491.

thus indicated a nostalgic desire to reunify Henry and Jane within a star dynasty, evoking their father-daughter dyad first disseminated to the nation in 1960. This impulse echoed emerging New Right ideology of the 1980s, whereby realigning the family had become an overt political issue.

Media interest in *On Golden Pond* intersected with contemporaneous conservatism by depicting the obfuscation of political identity a means of personal reconciliation. The ‘turbulent coming of age’ *Newsday* associated with the film included ‘almost a decade in strident political protest, during which [Jane] was denounced in Congress as a traitor and hanged in effigy from the steel girders of a Manhattan high rise’.⁵⁸ Furthermore, noted the paper, ‘bitter generational feuds with her father Henry Fonda coincided with the political tempests’.⁵⁹ These were expanded upon in Henry’s assisted autobiography, which was published to coincide with the release of *On Golden Pond*. In *Fonda: My Life*, an assisted autobiography with writer Howard Teichmann, Henry recounts telling Jane he would be the first person to ‘turn her in’ if he discovered the accusations of her being a Communist were true. Similarly, Jane narrates bringing politicised GIs to Henry’s New York townhouse to settle their personal argument over Vietnam being a just (or unjust) cause.⁶⁰ The ‘recuperation’ of Jane’s activist identity was therefore pinned to her father’s approval, and Jane, in turn, recounted her radicalisation in the press in childlike terms: ‘I lacked confidence in myself, I would borrow other people’s rhetoric – rhetoric that didn’t suit me. In many instances, I didn’t even know what the words meant.’⁶¹

⁵⁸ Stewart, ‘At Ease in a Mix of Roles’, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Henry Fonda, *Fonda: My Life* (New York: New American Library, 1981), p. 302.

⁶¹ Jane quoted in Stewart, ‘At Ease in a Mix of Roles’, p. 4.

In other publications, Jane contested that by becoming a radical she had not simply ‘rebelled’ against Henry and suggested their differing ideologies were no more or less ‘American’. The monthly magazine *Prime Time*, for example, reported Jane considered herself and her father to have harboured differing concepts of patriotism during the Vietnam War and instead claimed she encountered more worry justifying her nude scene in *Coming Home*.⁶² This attempt to divert attention away from her perceived generational rift with Henry during the Vietnam War was notable because Jane cited her nudity – a longer standing ‘controversy’ associated with her stardom – as a potential source of tension. Although prominent in *Coming Home*, Jane’s nudity remained synonymous with the pre-political image epitomised by *Barbarella*, when *Life* portrayed her as ‘[Henry] Fonda’s little girl Jane’. Despite being a double Oscar-winning actress, this regressive trajectory was further implied by the *Prime Time* article observing ‘*On Golden Pond* gave Jane Fonda a way to demonstrate her craft to her father’, as if her acting credentials still awaited his endorsement.⁶³

Despite lacking overtly political content, *On Golden Pond* did fit some of IPC’s dramaturgical devices and therefore offers insights into Jane’s journey away from her commercial-political stardom. The setting and mood of the original play predisposed the film to a degree of sentimentality and most certainly ruled out the apparatus of political cinema. Playwright Ernest Thompson, a former actor, based the work on his New England parents and guided the screenplay into the darker territory of aging and death at Bruce Gilbert’s request.⁶⁴ As the main authorial force of the play, therefore, Thompson’s experiences informed the tension between Chelsea and Norman, which, in turn, Jane’s participation endowed with a popular meaning and

⁶² Corby Kummer, ‘A Family Affair’, *Prime Time* (November 1981), pp. 37-38.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

significance. This process was a distinctive feature of Jane's IPC productions thus far; Ron Kovic's identity informed characterisations in *Coming Home*, Karen Silkwood's case was evoked through the characters' discoveries in *The China Syndrome*, and Karen Nussbaum's politics inspired the discontented workers of *Nine to Five*. *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* derived from Jane's political and personal identities respectively at the start of the 1980s yet reconfiguring Thompson's experiences within Jane's stardom was a continuation of IPC dramaturgy. As with previous IPC features, the burden of the film's 'identity source' was shared between characters, and therefore between stars, but typically rested with Jane as its focal point. Thompson's relative anonymity accentuated this – the indelible mark Jane left on the character of Chelsea exemplifies the common assumption that star and character shared biographical contexts. *On Golden Pond* departed from IPC's 'politicisation' strategies and this transition imparted a wider overture to contemporaneous ideology locating the family at the centre of American society.

Realising *On Golden Pond* required assembling a credible 'screen family' and recounting this reveals how the project became further associated with 'heritage' and nostalgia. Jane's relative lack of screen time drew the eminent stardom of *On Golden Pond*'s other players into tighter focus and Katharine Hepburn, in particular, stood poised to benefit as her film career had waned after *The Lion in Winter* (1968). Hepburn's archival papers reveal that she had first been alerted to the play by Mike Zimring, her agent at William Morris; Zimring also suggested Art Carney as a possible co-star for Hepburn in a screen version.⁶⁵ Hepburn thereafter pursued optioning the play and a letter dated 27 August, 1979, from director Hal Wallis, to

⁶⁵ Letter from Mike Zimring to 'Kate' (3 January 1979), 'William Morris', file 131, box 8, Katharine Hepburn papers, AMPAS [hereafter KH/AMPAS].

whom Hepburn had sent a speculative script, indicates this had proven unsuccessful.⁶⁶ It appears that IPC pursued optioning the play in competition with Hepburn and Jane's company received a more favourable response. Contemporaneous trade press touted Ingrid Bergman as a possible co-star for Henry but come December 1979 Hepburn's contract for shared top billing awaited only her signature. This was a prodigious pooling of stardom that amounted to more than the sum of its parts.

Casting Hepburn as Henry's wife and Jane's mother established a 'star family' of considerable Hollywood prestige. Not only did Hepburn attract publicity for *On Golden Pond* in her own right, but she carried associations with Henry and Jane both within and without the world of the film. Hepburn and Henry had their roots in the Golden Age of Hollywood, of course, but never appeared together in the same film. This accorded *On Golden Pond* 'event' status as the long-awaited meeting of two 'Old Hollywood' stars. That Hepburn should play Jane's mother also had its own sense of heritage, a theme the *New York Times* had broadly noted a year before the film's release:

Jane Fonda and Jill Clayburgh make movies that tell us as much about independent American women of the 1970s and 1980s as Katharine Hepburn's films revealed about similar women 40 years earlier. It is Miss Fonda, playing every sort of working woman from newscaster to prostitute, who comes closer than any other actress of her era to matching Miss Hepburn's eminence, and her skill.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Letter from Hal Wallis to Katharine Hepburn (27 August 1979), 'Correspondence', file 124, box 8, KH/AMPAS.

⁶⁷ Janet Maslin, 'The Independent Woman – From Hepburn to Clayburgh', *New York Times* (2 November 1980), p. D17.

Hepburn thus enlarged the appeal *On Golden Pond*, forging links between female stars of contrasting periods. It is the totality of Hepburn's characterisation and associations with the film, though, which elucidates her impact on Jane's recuperative portrayal of Chelsea Thayer.

The character of Ethel Thayer is the least complex role in narrative terms, meaning Hepburn's stardom resonated as an extra-textual feature of *On Golden Pond*. Themes explored by the film, such as aging, generational rifts and emotional intimacy, are centred on characters other than Ethel/Hepburn. Norman's fear of death consumes his thoughts and Chelsea's feelings of inadequacy around her father cause neurotic, unpredictable behaviour; both Norman's and Chelsea's crises are 'managed' by Ethel, who remains a carefree, uncomplicated soul throughout the film. Ethel's dramaturgical function in *On Golden Pond* is largely one of arbitration between Norman and Chelsea. Hepburn, moreover, had emerged from Hollywood's previous generation of 'independent women', and was noted by the film's director, Mark Rydell, as an historical role model for Jane:

Even though their politics are different, Katharine must recognize a similar kind of individuality in Jane that must have been threatening. After all, Jane is the big star of the '80s, and Katharine *was* the big star for so long. They were very standoffish at the beginning; you had the sense of two lionesses prowling the same area. But Jane made some real efforts, and Katharine began to see that Jane really respected her, which she was concerned about. Now you see

the two of them walking arm in arm and Katharine giving Jane motherly advice [original emphasis].⁶⁸

As character and ‘star’, Hepburn thus served a reconciliatory function for Henry and Jane.

Playing Jane’s mother in a film depicting generational disharmony endowed Hepburn’s Ethel with ideological resonance deriving from both Hollywood history and contemporaneous notions of familial reconciliation. *On Golden Pond* signals narrative resolution through Norman and Chelsea allaying their differences, the build-up to this climactic scene having witnessed Chelsea express to her mother the feelings of powerlessness she experiences around Norman. These particular scenes, in which the identities of Henry and Jane were assumed to mirror their characters, attracted most attention in the media but also highlighted Hepburn’s symbolic function as a maternal figure. Specifically, the media’s tendency toward reporting Henry and Jane’s reconciliation had to negotiate a familial ‘compromise’ insofar as Jane’s mother was absent from her life. This strand of Jane’s biography, as journalist Donald Katz observed in 1978, was part of the nation’s consciousness:

It is almost impossible not to be aware of Jane Fonda’s family background if you’ve grown up in America: that she grew up in an opulent scene out of a Henry James novel, that her mother killed herself when Jane was 12. [...] Jane found out how her mother died while leafing through a movie magazine. She

⁶⁸ Mark Rydell quoted in Kummer, ‘A Family Affair’, p. 35.

grew up having a father who embodied for an entire nation all of those qualities that are American and middle class and good.⁶⁹

Becoming a surrogate mother to Jane in the film meant Hepburn ‘completed’ the Fonda reunion, eliciting nostalgia for a family life that, in fact, existed only in cinematic form. *On Golden Pond* relies on familiarity with Henry and Jane’s relationship yet simultaneously constructs a ‘fantasy Fonda’ narrative whereby Henry married just once (rather than five times) and Jane’s poor relationship with her father – and the values he represents – is based on purely emotional, rather than ideological, differences.

On Golden Pond featured an additional characterisation that informed the film’s depiction of ‘traditional’ family values. Chelsea is accompanied by both her divorcee boyfriend (Dabney Coleman) and his surly son, Billy Ray Jr., whom Chelsea intends Norman and Ethel to look after while she and his father holiday overseas. Billy Ray, whose behaviour is coded as the product of a ruptured modern-day family, is figuratively healed of his malaise as the film progresses through experiencing the permanence of Norman and Ethel’s stable home and union. With his father and Chelsea vacationing in Europe (a decadent act in the world presented here) Billy Ray discovers fulfilment through outdoor pursuits in an idyllic American setting. Moreover, these settings are reminiscent of Henry’s defining films; *The Young Mr. Lincoln*, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* all used location shooting and Billy Ray is poised as Norman’s heir apparent, usurping Chelsea who is represented in the perpetual throes of urbanite neurosis. Billy Ray’s characterisation

⁶⁹ Donald Katz, ‘The Renaissance of Jane Fonda’, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (12 March 1978), p. E5.

closes the generation gap with Norman at the expense of Chelsea and his recuperation portrays Chelsea and her boyfriend as dysfunctional ‘children’ of the 1960s. In short, Billy Ray rediscovers his childhood innocence in a fashion echoing the family values valorised by the conservative renaissance of the 1980s.

Norman and Chelsea’s reunion in *On Golden Pond* is coded through cinematic devices. The film’s cinematography heavily emphasised the bucolic surroundings throughout and director Mark Rydell filmed the locations in the style of a nature documentary, using a piano soundtrack to segue between scenes. This device constructed an illusion of intimacy with the Fondas whilst also reducing the turbulent pasts of Norman and Chelsea to fragments within the film’s *mise-en-scène* (such as photographs and newspaper articles); the burden of narrative back story thus relies on the script, the actors’ performances and, crucially, the audience. As Deborah Holdstein has observed in response to the film, ‘we’re expected to fill in any developmental flaws regarding theme and characterisation with what we already know – that is, to appreciate the resonance of real-life relationships and personalities’.⁷⁰ The interpretative function of the audience therefore salvages the film’s meaning from any dramaturgical flaws of the work itself. Yet the construction of the film’s time and place in relation to its star protagonists further reveals the recuperative and ideological dimensions of *On Golden Pond*. In particular, the thematic emphasis on generational rifts and resolutions is consolidated by the spectacle of Henry and Jane appearing onscreen in a setting removed from contemporaneous iconography. The ostensible ‘timelessness’ and ‘placeless-ness’ of *On Golden Pond* suggests the forging and healing of their father-daughter relationship

⁷⁰ Deborah Holdstein, ‘*On Golden Pond*: The Backflip as Cultural Solution’ *Jump Cut* (July 1982), p. 3.

is enacted amidst a pastoral vision of 'Fonda Americana', a topography of the heart rendered for the screen. This fusion of reconciliation and sentimental drama provides a vehicle for quasi-nostalgia and also historical erasure; Henry and Jane reunite as an all-American father and daughter, achieved by obfuscating their political and/or morally risqué personal histories within their surrogate identities.

Discerning a dividing line between reality and fiction in *On Golden Pond* was a media preoccupation that the film's stars also aroused in publicity sources. Claiming in *Newsday* that the press had been 'creating a very neurotic relationship between me and my father',⁷¹ Jane's identification with Chelsea also resonated with experiences as both a woman and daughter:

[Chelsea] is a strong woman who is capable of having a successful life, but who has this father that she is *so* in awe of and actually loves so much that what she needs from him is more than he can give her. And *much* of her life is lived out in reaction to him. She either does things to get his attention, to make him mad or to get his approval [original emphasis].⁷²

This summation of Chelsea's background manifested in the film through Jane's dialogue 'I don't think I've ever grown up on Golden Pond', and 'I act like a big person everywhere else. I'm in *charge* of Los Angeles, and I come here – I feel like a little fat girl'. Chelsea confides these feelings to Ethel, which further positions Hepburn as the film's moral arbiter; when Ethel later slaps Chelsea in response to her daughter calling Norman a 'selfish son of a bitch' ('That selfish son of a bitch

⁷¹ Jane quoted in Stewart, 'At Ease in a Mix of Roles', p. 5.

⁷² Ibid.

happens to be my husband!'), Hepburn wields the principles of her (older) generation, forcing Jane/Chelsea to fall into line and settle her differences with her father. When plotted within the broader constellation of Jane's stardom, Chelsea's capitulation implied a crucial ideological compromise – Jane finally 'grows up' on Golden Pond, by shaking off the 'unhappy' (and unseen) years of political revolt as an independent woman.

On Golden Pond reinterpreted Henry and Jane's differences in a sympathetic light, much as Vietnam had been cautiously re-associated with Jane's stardom in *Coming Home*. Support for this inclination was exhibited by an early critical notice: in a commentary that could have applied to Jane or Chelsea equally, Judith Crist wrote in the *Saturday Review* 'Fonda makes clear her growth from a grudge-nurturing child to a woman who is approaching contentment'.⁷³ Surrounded by co-stars of the highest order, *On Golden Pond* provided an opportunity to parade the calibre of liberal family stock that Chelsea/Jane had originated from. Jane termed the making of the film a gift to her father; in its wider historical and political context, however, *On Golden Pond* demonstrated how reformed radical and liberal capitalist alike could become enmeshed in the ascendant ideological symbolism of America's New Right 'family values'.

***On Golden Pond*: reception and legacy**

Critical reviews of the film exhibited various responses, mostly contemplating the pairing of two Hollywood heavyweights and the theme reconciliation. Richard

⁷³ Judith Crist, 'Film' *Saturday Review* (8 December 1981), p. 69.

Schickel's review in *Time* magazine praised the casting and observed '*On Golden Pond* is a mature movie',⁷⁴ implying it provided a diversion from the burgeoning cycle of blockbusters. Similarly, *Newsweek*'s David Ansen described the film as an 'event in movie star mythology', and while acknowledging its sentimentality, suggested audiences would be guilty of cynicism if they failed to embrace it: '*On Golden Pond* is an intelligent tear-jerker, a handcrafted heartbreaker.'⁷⁵ New York reviewers embraced their cynicism, nonetheless, with Pauline Kael's *New Yorker* review stating: 'This isn't material for actors, no matter what their age. It's material for milking tears from an audience.'⁷⁶ Vincent Canby wrote in the *New York Times* 'the film almost breaks its neck in seeking our love',⁷⁷ but on a final note of redemption, praised *On Golden Pond* as an exercise in 'seeing what real artists can do with inferior material'.⁷⁸ In his mixed response, Andrew Sarris reminded readers of Henry's great screen roles yet expressed concern at how his character dominated the film, especially as Ethel and Chelsea defer to Norman throughout most of the narrative. The effusive parting words of Sarris's *Village Voice* review saw him break ranks with the scepticism of Kael and Canby, however, indicating that the New York intelligentsia were susceptible to the film's emotional pull: 'There are feelings on the screen so unabashedly naked that perhaps we should never be permitted to see them. But they are there all the same, and we should feel privileged that three such glorious star presences have chosen to share with us their deepest fears and sorrows.'⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Richard Schickel, 'At Last, Kate and Hank!', *Time* (16 November 1981), p. 112.

⁷⁵ David Ansen, 'A Late Autumn Sonata', *Newsweek* (30 November 1981), p. 57.

⁷⁶ Pauline Kael, 'The Current Cinema', *New Yorker* (7 December 1981), JFCC/AMPAS.

⁷⁷ Vincent Canby, 'Can There Be a Great Performance in a Weak Movie?', *New York Times* (13 December 1981), p. D17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. D22.

⁷⁹ Andrew Sarris, 'Theater into Film, Life into Death', *Village Voice* (9 December 1981), p. 51.

Admiring the stars of *On Golden Pond* for their cinematic heritage as much as screen roles elicited commentary on their worth as national icons. Echoing his New York peers, David Denby offered a mixed review, criticising the dramaturgy as ‘correspondence course Chekhov’ and the filmmaking as ‘correspondence course Bergman’.⁸⁰ Yet akin to Sarris, Denby admitted feeling touched by prestigious stars playing solid archetypes: ‘The movie is a testimonial to Yankee strength. These two [Norman and Ethel] have grown old without losing their form, their moral firmness, and so have the actors.’⁸¹ Pauline Kael, the lone voice of dissent, warned that the film was in danger of turning its veteran stars into ‘monuments’ by parading as an ‘indecently premature memorial service’.⁸² Objecting to coverage in *Time* that spoke of ‘breeding’ and ‘lineage’, Kael suggested this was a widespread fixation: ‘I don’t think this snobbery should be blamed on the Reagans, I think it’s a worshipfulness (and maybe envy) and overcomes some people when they look at Helpburn’s imperious bones.’⁸³

The cultural implications of *On Golden Pond* were defined by its generational mix of stars. A review in the educational periodical *Senior Scholastic*, for example, stressed its universal themes: ‘Maybe you feel that movies about getting old have nothing to say to you. But *On Golden Pond* is talking to all of us. It deals with feelings and experiences most of us have had or will have. It shows how the young and old need each other, and can help each other.’⁸⁴ The film’s latent ideological themes were also thrown into relief in the context of contemporaneous American politics. Specifically, the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 was an event that

⁸⁰ David Denby, ‘Kate and Hank’, *New York* (7 December 1981), p. 156.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kael, ‘The Current Cinema’, JFCC/AMPAS.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Margaret Ronan, ‘Movies’, *Senior Scholastic* (19 March 1982), p. 19.

confirmed the rise of New Right ideology during the 1970s. Historian Robert Dallek recounts Reagan's acceptance speech before the 1980 Republican convention as exhibiting 'familiar conservative themes – less government, lower taxes, balanced budgets, family values,' and observes 'if these ideas had been associated mostly with ultraconservatives in 1964 [the year of Republican Barry Goldwater's disastrous presidential campaign], by 1980 they were catch phrases that reached to the nerve center of America'.⁸⁵ Dallek's account elicits two key points. Firstly, despite her left-wing political identity, Jane's approach to the film and its publicity indicated an alignment – or at least ideological ambiguity – regarding her associations with so-called 'family values'. Secondly, Dallek identifies that the American mainstream by 1980 had altered to the extent where conservative ideology had become a strategic overture of the Republican Party in order to regain the Presidency. Given that Jane had committed to maintaining a mainstream presence through political cinema, *On Golden Pond* thus occupied a contradictory position: the film's thinly veiled depiction of healing generational rifts between two high profile left-wing stars had been wholeheartedly embraced by a nation in the throes of an ultraconservative renaissance. *On Golden Pond* was not conceived as a right-wing film, yet traded in conservative imagery – for the Fondas and America the film offered recuperative shelter from the divisions of the 1970s.

The marketing campaign for *On Golden Pond* courted Middle American sensibilities, primarily through its manner of representation. The theatrical release poster for the film was a case in point (fig. 14), of which Pauline Kael observed in her

⁸⁵ Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 56.

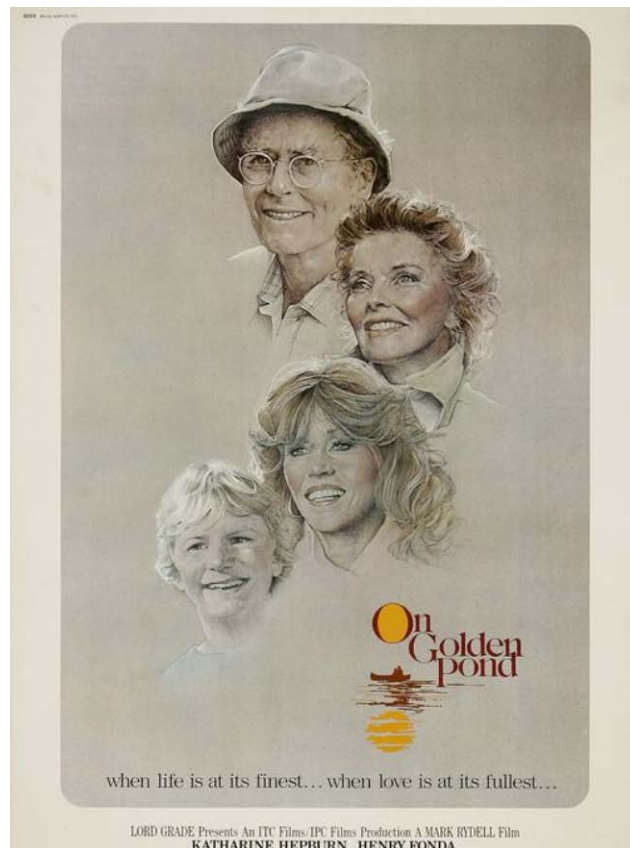


Figure 14. Theatrical poster for *On Golden Pond*:
'a knockoff of a Norman Rockwell'.

review for the *New Yorker*: 'it's no accident that the publicity sketch showing Henry Fonda, in a fishing hat, and the smiling faces of Hepburn, Jane Fonda, and Doug McKeon [the child co-star of the film] looks like a knockoff of a Norman Rockwell *Saturday Evening Post* cover. That's the world the film tries to evoke.'⁸⁶ Although Kael's caustic dismissal denoted her wider disregard for *On Golden Pond*, she nevertheless revealed how Jane's stardom – particularly in a familial composition – could be rendered in a popular style of quintessential Americana. This transition hinged on Jane accentuating her deferential persona of 'Henry's daughter'.

⁸⁶ Kael, 'The Current Cinema', JFCC/AMPAS.

On Golden Pond dovetailed with its associated publicity in an effortless manner; as a film purporting to represent ‘intimacy’, it generated instant angles for journalists and Jane was on hand to fill column inches with candid interviews. The range of publications indicated widespread interest and Jane’s willingness to universalise her image to suit disparate readerships. *Ladies Home Journal* represented Jane as a conscientious wife, mother and daughter in its article publicising *On Golden Pond*: ‘Today, father and daughter are on the best of terms. In their new movie [...] art and life merge as Henry and Jane embrace on screen with a renewed father/daughter closeness.’⁸⁷ This merger of ‘art and life’ was also applied to personal histories: ‘Jane says that she now understands the problems Henry had as a parent; that she knows she hurt him in her rebellion.’⁸⁸ The representation of reconciliation in *On Golden Pond* relied on prior knowledge of Jane and Henry’s star histories yet these overwhelmed the cinematic event itself. Publicity following the release of the film mostly treated it as a vehicle for discussions of Jane’s relationship with her father, which drew from various stages of her life and career. This indicated that despite the attempted parallel categorisation of ‘film’ and ‘reality’, ‘art’ and ‘life’, these pairings were perpetually being breached and flooded by ‘reality’.

On Golden Pond constituted an ‘instantly’ public, biographical event for Henry and Jane, escalated by a social desire for their star images to realign within parameters of family values ideology. Jane’s contributions to the film’s publicity were a crucial element of this process, whereby the narrative of her life alluded to the narrative of the scenes with her father. ‘Jane admits to lacking in self-confidence and

⁸⁷ Dorothy Ann Glasser and Stephen Decatur, ‘Jane Fonda: Would You Believe She’s an Old-fashioned Mom?’, *Ladies Home Journal* (February 1982), p. 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

wanting to be liked’,⁸⁹ observed *Ladies Home Journal*, whilst in *Playgirl*, a publication more aligned with independent women, Jane confessed to needing parental approval throughout her twenties: ‘I wanted him to approve of me so much that I didn’t allow myself to be myself. So, when you feel like that with someone, there’s constant fear and self-censorship. You don’t know quite how you are supposed to be, so you tend to revert to childishness and discomfort and shyness.’⁹⁰ Concurrently, Jane recounted how working with Henry made her feel ‘ten years old again’ and, indeed, that this reversion to childishness had complemented her method acting approach to the role: ‘There was this bizarre feeling of emptiness and nausea in my stomach, which I knew so often growing up. I wanted to cry but I didn’t. At the same time, some part of me was saying, this is exactly what your character is supposed to feel. It’s perfect for this scene!’⁹¹ The collision of personal history and acting technique implied here revealed how the reality and fiction of *On Golden Pond* became infused by its confessional, therapeutic components.

A recurring feature of the film’s publicity involved Jane recounting her journey of generational conflict and resolution with Henry. She sought to humanise Henry’s stardom in widely read publications, such as *Redbook*, by suggesting he harboured vulnerabilities she herself had ‘inherited’. This inheritance, she implied, manifested in her rebellion against his national prestige:

My father is an extremely shy, introverted, antisocial person who finds it extremely difficult to express himself. And that kind of person is a difficult person to be the child of. [...] But there is something about my father – people

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Celeste Fremon, ‘Jane Fonda Interview’, *Playgirl* (January 1982), p. 42.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 43.

have a very deep feeling about him. He represents the best of this country – justice and morality and values and integrity. I think it’s true of a lot of children of public people, that there are places where the public image and your own hurt feelings clash, and you want to get back and *hurt*. And the way you hurt is through the public image. So at the times when my father and weren’t getting along, I used public means to get back at him. [...] And it works the other way. I don’t remember his telling me he loved me until very recently, but I read it. He would say it to a journalist but he never told me [original emphasis].⁹²

An alignment asserted above – between Henry’s star image and the mainstream – reveals that Jane’s rebellion (especially as an anti-war activist) functioned simultaneously on a personal and national level, as her father’s moral and political conscience was purported to be evocative of the nation itself. Similarly, Jane created temporal and emotional distance in her interviews between her contemporaneous identity and that of her radical past by affirming a cyclical paradigm. In an issue of *Family Weekly* published on the eve of the Academy Awards, Jane declared: ‘I think a lot of my rebellious lifestyle was a way to break away from being Henry’s daughter. [...] Once you’re less rebellious, you can grow closer to your parents; and then if you continue that trajectory, you reach a point when there’s almost a role reversal. You become the parent of your parents.’⁹³ The American media proved to be critical in affirming Henry and Jane’s familial bond and in the process echoed the ascendant mainstream ideology of the culture at large, which had witnessed radicalism recede and conservatism surge forward. As *Redbook* journalist Aimee Lee Ball observed in

⁹² Jane quoted in Aimee Lee Ball, ‘The Unofficial Jane Fonda’, p. 28.

⁹³ Jane quoted in Kate White, ‘Oh, Henry!’, *Family Weekly* (28 March 1982), p. 6.

her March 1982 article, 'I have the feeling, even as I write, that I am acting as a kind of conduit for this inarticulate father and daughter. I am happy to do so.'⁹⁴

The interest *On Golden Pond* received in the media was consolidated during the 1982 award season. In keeping with its commercial success the film received ten Oscar nominations, including Best Film, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Supporting Actress. Hollywood thus endorsed the project from a variety of angles; *On Golden Pond* received recognition for the prowess of its actors and its cinematic achievements. On 29 March, 1982, the Academy Awards were presented, with Henry and Katharine Hepburn beating off stiff competition in their respective categories to secure Best Actor and Best Actress. *Family Weekly* had described Henry as 'the heavy sentimental favorite',⁹⁵ and the industry's elite delivered its verdict accordingly. That Jane lost out to Maureen Stapleton in *Reds* (1981) in the Best Supporting Actress category was a minor blow, especially as she had termed *On Golden Pond* 'a present to my father'. *Reds* is an epic political drama set in American and Russia during the Bolshevik Revolutionary era. Directed by its leading man, Warren Beatty, *Reds* had vied for the coveted Best Picture Oscar against the vastly dissimilar *On Golden Pond*; both eventually lost out to *Chariots of Fire* (1981), although perhaps their differing ideological visions allowed the British film to emerge as the 'median' victor. Beatty had also been nominated alongside Henry in for the Best Actor award and similarly Diane Keaton was nominated alongside Katharine Hepburn. That Henry and Hepburn were favoured over Beatty and Keaton suggested a

⁹⁴ Aimee Lee Ball, 'The Unofficial Jane Fonda', p. 28.

⁹⁵ Kate White, 'Oh, Henry!', p. 5.

degree of sentimentality as these decisions championed ‘Old Hollywood’ stars over those of the New Hollywood, a ‘family’ narrative over a political one.⁹⁶

Losing the Best Supporting Actress award to Stapleton was significant in the context of Jane’s shift away from politically driven cinema, as signalled by her choice to star in and co-produce *On Golden Pond*. In *Reds*, Stapleton portrayed the anarchist Emma Goldman, who was politically active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in both America and Russia, including making speeches that attracted the charge of incitement to riot. In essence, Goldman was a prominent radical of her day and therefore an historical predecessor of left-wing activists when Jane became radicalised in the early-1970s. *Reds* and *On Golden Pond* offered Academy voters – and the wider American audience – a political or pastoral vision of American identity, much as *Rollover* and *On Golden Pond* had segregated the political and ‘ancestral’ dimensions of Jane’s stardom. By awarding Stapleton the Oscar for her portrayal of Emma Goldman the Academy had not totally endorsed Jane’s ‘vulnerable child’ role of Chelsea Thayer. Playing the role of Henry’s daughter in the media for the American public, nonetheless, indicated that if Jane had not won the battle, she had certainly won the war.

Jane and Henry were seen to reconcile both within and without the narrative of *On Golden Pond*. In a striking cover of *People* (fig. 15), father and daughter appear to trade photographic environments, with Jane restored to the estranging world of glamour (black and white hues connoting cinema of a ‘classic’ variety) and Henry

⁹⁶ Beatty did, however, win the Best Director award and Vittorio Storaro won Best Cinematography, giving *Reds* 3 wins from 12 nominations compared to 3 wins from 10 nominations for *On Golden Pond*. *Reds* was also outperformed by *On Golden Pond* at the American box office.

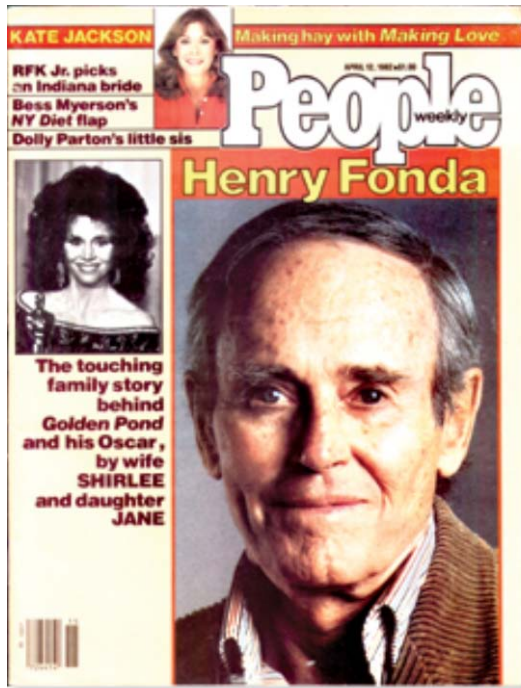


Figure 15. *People* (12 April 1982).



Figure 16. *People* (12 April 1982).

exposed as an aging mortal in the ‘reality’ of colour. The feature’s photographs, nevertheless, rendered the reconciliation in an epic tone that a mainstream public would have emotionally invested in (fig.16). Henry and Jane are depicted almost ‘merging’, each clutching the Oscar, the elixir of their fame yet also an emblem of their isolation from the American ‘ordinariness’ they each seemed so eager to personify.

Conclusion

The reconciliatory portrait of *On Golden Pond* was perceived to harmonise the personal histories of Jane and Henry Fonda. Yet key themes and devices of the film indicated it had as much to say about the present as the past, when considered in the

context of contemporaneous cultural, moral, and political discourse. *On Golden Pond* is remembered as Henry's final film and his only appearance with both Hepburn and his daughter, rather than the last feature of IPC Films, which Jane had formed, as we have seen, to infuse commercial cinema with political issues. Indeed, in the flurry of personal congratulations that Hepburn received after her Best Actress triumph, *On Golden Pond* was praised as a soothing alternative to the apparent abundance of films containing sex and violence. Having abstained from fulfilling its political remit, the last film of IPC thus detoured risqué content that ten years earlier had loomed large in Jane's first Oscar success, *Klute*. The political appeal of *On Golden Pond* and its players ultimately existed through its absence of 'objectionable' content; as Hepburn's congratulations files make clear, the admiration of 'Yankee strength' that Denby had expressed was also something shared by those closest to President Reagan:

Dear Miss Hepburn – we so enjoyed our meeting – too brief, of course, but for Barbara and me, a highlight not soon forgotten. [...] This is about last night's Oscar, too. Hooray for you – 3 cheers for excellence and style and class and warmth. 3 cheers for your decency. Affectionate regards from yet another Hepburn fan. George Bush.⁹⁷

On Golden Pond was influenced by its past and present contexts yet the film also had lasting implications for the future of Jane's stardom. This departure from the commercial-political strategies of IPC revealed a major transition, yet would over time attest to the volatility of creating a renewed 'idyllic' portrait in cinematic form.

⁹⁷ Postcard from George H. W. Bush to Hepburn (undated), file 121, box 8, KH/AMPAS.

Twenty-one years after sharing a *Life* cover portrait with her father, Jane had become Henry's daughter once again with *On Golden Pond*. The journey from *Life* to *On Golden Pond* formed a reconciliatory trajectory, yet the film also constituted the pinnacle of her recuperation from the image of 'Hanoi Jane'. With Henry's passing in August 1982 from a pre-existing heart condition, Jane became the senior Fonda figure and her individual stardom and prominence as a woman came under harsher scrutiny as the Reagan era unfolded.

Chapter 7

Rise and Fallout: Fonda and the 1980s

‘In the ’70s she went to Hanoi in protest of the war and angered Middle America. Now it’s Jane selling sweatsuits, Jane at the Super Bowl, Jane chatting with Andy Warhol. [...] Is she running for First Lady? “I don’t even think about that,” she says. But she’s in hot pursuit of the mainstream, even while acknowledging that “some people will never forgive me.”’

John M. Wilson, ‘See Jane Run’,

Los Angeles Times Calendar (29 April 1984), p. 1.

‘Women whose battle for control drives them out of control are great subjects for Fonda, and, in *The Morning After*, she seems to be playing her worst nightmare – someone victimized both by society and by her own self-destructive impulses.’

David Edelstein, ‘Jane Gets Physical’,

Village Voice (30 December 1986), p. 74.

‘For Fonda, no amount of self-transformation will save her from being cast in legend as the figure of the seductive woman who turns out to be a snake. It’s the oldest story in the world.’

Carol Burke, *Camp All-American, Hanoi Jane, and the*

High-and-Tight: Gender, Folklore, and Changing

Military Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), p. 186.

Introduction

This chapter provides an analytical account of Fonda's stardom during the 1980s, with a shared emphasis on her filmic and non-filmic activities. In the wake of *On Golden Pond*, its Oscar success, and Henry's demise, the commercial and political associations of Fonda's career developed in tandem; Tom Hayden was elected to the California Assembly in 1982, thanks in large part to a campaign funded by Fonda's Hollywood career. As the 1980s progressed, her principal earnings – and media presence – increasingly derived from her entrepreneurial ventures as America's aerobics guru and Fonda made only four further Hollywood films, the last being *Stanley and Iris* (1989).¹ The 1980s did not lessen Fonda's mainstream visibility; in some ways her image became ubiquitous through multiple modes of dissemination, given the audiovisual and print campaigns of what simply became known as 'The Workout'.² Rather, Fonda's commercial-political stardom restructured around the new polarities of her identity, thus exposing its inherent contradictions. The star image of Jane Fonda in the 1980s signified – at its extremes – an aerobics entrepreneur and a lapsed radical with a questionable activist past. Given the fusion of IPC's commercial and political concerns was best represented by the 1979 release of *The China Syndrome* coinciding with Three Mile Island, it is notable that, a decade on, the final days of the 1980s suggested the commercial and political aspects of Fonda's stardom exhibited irreconcilable differences. Indeed, Fonda and Hayden's announcement of their separation in 1989 proved the most potent symbol of this rupture. As the ubiquity of The Workout magnified, Fonda's activities in North

¹ This would prove to be a sixteen year hiatus when she returned to Hollywood as Viola Fields, overbearing mother-in-law to Jennifer Lopez in *Monster-in Law* (2005).

² *The Jane Fonda Workout* was released as a book, record, and home video, achieving astounding sales in all media. I will discuss the quantitative details in greater depth later in the chapter.

Vietnam during the previous decade were concurrently embroidered to a damaging, 'mythological' degree. 'Hanoi Jane' was reinvented for the 1980s by America's right-wing war veterans and through the looking glass of Vietnam revisionism she was endowed with hostile, unbounded powers. In short, Fonda became a high profile casualty of a larger phenomenon pertaining to women in America, which feminist scholar Susan Faludi has collectively termed *Backlash*.³

The structure of this chapter is broken into distinct but interlocking sections that identify her associations with both the 'big' screen (Hollywood films, both realised and unrealised) and the 'small' screen (television; the dawn of the home video market). Subsequently it is contended that these dual careers visually and thematically collided within *The Morning After* (1986), which earned Fonda an Academy Award nomination. Playing an alcoholic actress in decline that wakes up next to a murdered man, Fonda's propensity for chameleonic image changes is exemplified by this *noir*-like thriller, which explores motifs of fractured identity, betrayal, and personal metamorphosis. Moreover, *The Morning After* was released amidst a slew of male-driven Vietnam films, such as the elegiac *Platoon* (1986) and reactionary *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985). The success of these films indicated a climate in which the Vietnam War had become subject to revisionism in the popular consciousness and Fonda's anti-war activities began to attract reinterpretation of epic proportions; that Fonda retired from film acting in 1990 should, therefore, be explored in relation to Hollywood's second wave of Vietnam features. Having cultivated a dual presence on both America's 'big' and 'small' screens, the question remains how and

³ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991). Although Fonda is not mentioned directly in *Backlash*, I intend to apply Faludi's findings to the phenomenon of 'Hanoi Jane' later in the chapter.

why Fonda disconnected from Hollywood, cementing the demise of IPC and her commercial-political stardom.

From movie star to media star

During the early-1980s, Fonda initiated projects in a number of different media alongside her Hollywood films, making her one of the most prominent women in the United States. Breaking into the book, television and home video markets had become both viable and attractive because of her established – and commercially robust – Hollywood stardom. Moreover, Fonda and Hayden understood the power of mainstream media and this likely informed communication strategy of their Campaign for Economic Democracy [CED]. With the runaway success of *On Golden Pond*, Fonda was remarkably well placed in Hollywood to pursue further projects under the auspices of IPC Films, which since its debut feature had proven her as one of the industry's most shrewd star-producers. *Coming Home* and *On Golden Pond* were the first and last features of IPC and both were significantly recognised by the Academy. That each of these films vied for the Best Picture Oscar at their respective ceremonies indicated IPC's exemplary track record, yet also attested to Hollywood's willingness to reward both Fonda's political and apolitical cinematic accomplishments. Moreover, during the early-1980s, IPC Films constituted just one arm of Fonda's growing media portfolio.

The reportage IPC received during the 1980s exhibited shifts in emphasis that implied Fonda's stardom was undergoing commercial and political diversification. Business magazine *Savvy*, for example, tailored particularly for executive women,

profiled her in February 1982 and suggested IPC had become simply one of Fonda's many media based occupations:

Jane Fonda pursues five separate careers at once. You have just met, thanks to an intensive television blitz, the fitness freak – wealthy entrepreneur of three successful exercise centers – and you already know the political activist. Now say hello to the ideologue producer and devoted family woman – political wife, guilty mother, eager-to-please daughter – and have you met the soft-hearted boss? [...] Fonda is a compulsive over achiever and she wants her views – whether on fitness, banking or nuclear energy – to receive as wide an audience as possible.⁴

This portrait of a multi-faceted identity was hardly a new development for Fonda's stardom; rather, the *Savvy* article indicated a refocusing of Fonda's image into a set of components driven by entrepreneurial impulses, which would, in turn, underpin Fonda's ubiquitous media presence over the course of the decade.

The original IPC model of 'audience politicisation' remained discernible in media coverage during the 1980s but Fonda's choice to diversify into other media forms indicated an increasing concern with 'small screen' enterprises. In January 1982, Fonda told monthly entertainment magazine *After Dark*: 'I see IPC as a tool for changing Hollywood's and the public's perception of women. Now that I'm involved, totally involved, I enjoy acting more than ever before.'⁵ This sentiment chimed with

⁴ Maureen Orth, 'The Education of Jane Fonda: A Late-Blooming Business Woman', *Savvy* (February 1982), p. 32.

⁵ Fonda quoted in George Haddad-Garcia, 'The Prime of Ms. Jane Fonda', *After Dark* (January 1982), p. 32.

her original positioning of IPC's aims during the company's first years and Fonda's emphasis on her input as an actress obscured her role as a producer, a point at odds with the contemporaneous *Savvy* article. Indeed, despite claiming in her *After Dark* profile she was not business-oriented enough for producing, Fonda nonetheless revealed herself as an ambitious strategist by describing plans for IPC to develop a television arm, films for other actresses, and a talk show structured by current affairs.⁶

While Fonda ultimately remained the sole female star of IPC's realised film projects and talk of a talk show remained just that, television did provide the company with a window of opportunity in two major instances. On 25th March, 1982, network channel ABC aired the first episode of a television series of *Nine to Five*, adapted by IPC from its own feature released in 1980.⁷ While none of the film's original stars resumed their roles, Fonda did work as a producer and executive producer on the show, which ran for two full series until closing mid-way through the third series in 1983. The following year, Fonda starred in a television movie entitled *The Dollmaker*, which also aired on ABC and was based on Harriet Arnow's 1954 novel.⁸ Fonda received an Emmy for her role as Gertie Nevels, a Kentucky sharecropper faced with uprooting to wartime Detroit to ensure the survival of her family. Originally conceived as a feature film, *The Dollmaker* had remained on IPC's development slate during the 1970s and 80s. When screened on Mother's Day in 1984, the television movie marked Fonda's first appearance as an actress since *On Golden Pond*.⁹

⁶ Haddad-Garcia, 'The Prime of Ms. Jane Fonda', p. 34.

⁷ *Savvy* magazine described *Nine to Five* as 'probably the most profitable "woman's picture" ever made' and indicated that Fonda owned 50% of the television rights. Orth, 'The Education of Jane Fonda', p. 34.

⁸ Feminist author Erica Jong described termed the novel 'as close to a female *Grapes of Wrath* as one can find.' Erica Jong, 'Jane Fonda: An Interview by Erica Jong', *Ladies Home Journal* (April 1984), p. 144.

⁹ Mother's Day in the United States occurs in May. The exact date was 13 May 1984.

The Dollmaker was reminiscent of Henry's pastoral films discussed in the previous chapter while concurrently exhibiting conservative tendencies. Fonda performs her role with a moral integrity comparable to Henry's screen characters; Gertie is guided by the rural, religious values she was brought up with, which contrasts with her husband, Clovis (Levon Helm), who embraces the modernity of wartime Detroit. Clovis is happier to live on credit and consume beyond their means rather than conserve for the future, while Gertie never loses sight of moving back to Kentucky and owning a farm of their own. When Clovis is ordered to go on strike and his association with the union turns sour, Gertie's skills as a whittler provide redemption for the family when her work is commissioned by a local craft retailer. In a final act of sacrifice, Gertie destroys an imposing woodcarving of Jesus she has been whittling throughout the film in order to recycle this wood for her commissions; the money she then receives provides the last part of what the family needs to return to Kentucky and leave Detroit once and for all.

As the first television movie of IPC Films *The Dollmaker* marked a shift in strategy and Fonda's choice of the medium indicated her respect for the social reach of the small screen: 'I used to be an elitist, and looked down on television [...] then I saw *Roots* and the remarkable impact it had. You can't ignore television. You've got to join it, if you're at all interested in communication.'¹⁰ *Roots*, which screened on ABC in early 1977, secured record audience numbers and Fonda's reference to its success denotes that she considered television a viable platform for IPC to cultivate new projects. Moreover, publicity for *The Dollmaker* indicates that the IPC deal with

¹⁰ Fonda quoted in Wilson, 'See Jane Run', p. 1.

ABC was agreed the day after Fonda won her second Oscar for *Coming Home*, bearing out her claim that she chose television from a strong rather than weak industrial position.¹¹ When reporting this strategy in 1984, journalist John Wilson considered it '[Fonda's] latest step in a concerted effort to reach a wider audience and win the hearts of Middle America by projecting a new image: devoted wife and mother, dynamic businesswoman, health advocate, one who embraces certain traditional American values.'¹² Certainly Gertie Nevels was unlike any character Fonda had ever played and by exhibiting a mythic connection with rural Kentucky the ideology of *The Dollmaker* celebrated nostalgia and simplicity, with modernity equated with corruption. In hindsight, Fonda's success in television was acute, brief, and even aberrant given that her enduring impact on the small screen ultimately resided in video, then a cutting-edge 'modern' enterprise. Charting Fonda's involvement with the small screen as a star and hidden-hand producer, nonetheless, reveals how she pursued media projects beyond the familiar boundaries of cinema.

Fonda's ambition to utilise media forms other than cinema and the manner in which this was reported suggested her presence within the American mainstream during the early-1980s was undergoing a process of diversification and reconfiguration. Accordingly, after moving into television development, IPC did not realise another feature film. The Fonda-Gilbert partnership behind IPC's commercial-political cinema did reassemble in 1986 for *The Morning After*, but the company had reportedly 'dissolved': 'Gilbert founded his own company, American Filmworks, and

¹¹ Stephen Farber, "'It's as Far From What I Am as Anything I'll Ever Play'", *New York Times* (13 May 1984), p. A33.

¹² Wilson, 'See Jane Run', p. 1.

she has Fonda Films,' reported *Elle* magazine.¹³ Yet an attempt to locate the exact 'obituary' of IPC Films is perhaps missing the point given Fonda's burgeoning media stardom – rather than movie stardom – during the 1980s. Indeed, identifying what took the place of IPC as the central axis of Fonda's stardom, and how this was constructed within the wider media provides a context for the company fading from view and what this implied for Fonda's ongoing status in American cultural and political life.

It is ironic that the one outright flop of IPC Films, *Rollover*, should have Fonda play a woman entering the world of business and finance, as her real-life entrepreneurship is one of the most definitive episodes of 1980s popular culture. Moreover, Fonda's transition from film acting to leading a fitness craze was itself partly a personal metamorphosis, one of the dramaturgical hallmarks of IPC Films. Having moved into television production and eventually television acting whilst the success of *On Golden Pond* was consolidated at the 1982 Academy Awards ceremony, Fonda concurrently constructed a notable presence in one of the newest technological media of her time – the home video market. *The Jane Fonda Workout* initiated one of Fonda's most recognisable incarnations and meant that her image resided in films, on magazine covers, and on living room video screens at any given time. With ubiquity, however, came the potential for contradiction, one of the defining traits of Fonda's stardom in the media and in America.

¹³ Joan Goodman, 'Jane Fonda', *Elle* (December 1986), p. 78. Fonda Films is associated with only two realised projects; *Broken Trust* (1995), made for television and not featuring Fonda, and *Old Gringo* (1989), her penultimate film before retiring in 1990.

The Workout

The Jane Fonda Workout (1982)¹⁴ and its following series launched the ‘video stardom’ phase of her career and indelibly marked popular culture in America during the 1980s. Inspired by a Beverly Hills aerobics centre Fonda opened and taught at in 1979, *The Workout* was distributed on a mass scale through the virtually simultaneous rollout of its print, audio and video campaigns during 1981 and 1982.¹⁵ Accordingly, the corporate and body image dimensions of popularising aerobics have defined Fonda’s relationship with fitness culture, rather than Hayden’s political base, which *The Workout* was originally conceived to subsidise.¹⁶ Moreover, the obfuscation of Fonda’s political identity in relation to her screen image – exemplified by her video stardom – reveals how the activism of Fonda’s past was reinterpreted during the later years of the 1980s.

The cultural impact and commercial success of *The Workout* cannot be overstated. Between the release of *On Golden Pond* and the television premiere of *The Dollmaker* – a two and half year gap in screen roles – Fonda’s image went into major circulation through her multimedia line of aerobic products. By April 1984, *JFW* had sold approximately 275,000 copies at \$60 each, making it the biggest selling non-musical video in American history. This earned the CED-owned Workout Inc. approximately \$2 million. *Jane Fonda’s Workout Book* sold two million copies in hardcover at \$19.95 each and was on the *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list for ninety

¹⁴ I shall refer to this videotape as *JFW* herein and to Fonda’s collective aerobics venture as ‘The Workout’.

¹⁵ *Jane Fonda’s Workout Record* and *Jane Fonda’s Workout Book* were released/published in 1981, followed by *JFW* in 1982.

¹⁶ Fonda and Hayden’s CED owned the aerobics centres in Beverly Hills, Encino and San Francisco; CED also owned the video, print, audio incarnations of *The Workout*. This was discussed unguardedly: see, for example, Maureen Orth, ‘Jane Fonda: Driving Passions’, *Vogue* (February 1984), p. 415.

weeks; the trade paperback version sold more than 250,000 copies at \$9.95 each. *Jane Fonda's Year of Fitness and Health/1984* desk diary, which retailed for \$8.95, had two print runs totalling 250,000 copies. Jane Fonda Workout and Active Wear, manufactured by Capri Beachwear Corporation in partnership with Fonda, was being carried by Saks Fifth Avenue and nearly one hundred major retail outlets across the nation; the clothing line was projected to gross more than \$30 million in 1984 alone.¹⁷

Positioning The Workout as a strategic multimedia enterprise involved branding Fonda's image across various merchandise, yet in its original print format she had functioned as an individual spokesperson for her 'philosophy' of fitness. This was demonstrated explicitly through the publication of her sole authored *Workout Book* in November 1981.¹⁸ By including biographical content that would have otherwise featured as part of an intimate magazine interview, Fonda's *Workout Book* suggested fitness – like politics before it – was as essential part of her personal growth.¹⁹ Comprising chapters on nutrition, health, and beauty, as well as demonstrations of the exercises themselves (not performed by Fonda, however), the *Workout Book* also included sections on political issues that Fonda had hitherto been associated with, such as environmental pollution and women in the workplace. Fonda contextualised the inclusion of these issues as arising out of a truly globalist approach to health:

¹⁷ All of these figures are sourced from Wilson, 'See Jane Run', p. 22. Wilson's figures are sourced from *Fortune* magazine, Simon & Schuster, and Fonda's press representative.

¹⁸ Jane Fonda, *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981). I shall refer to this source herein simply as *Workout Book*.

¹⁹ In 'Part One: Lessons Learned,' Fonda recounts her use of Dexedrine and diuretics for losing weight. Her use of diuretics did not cease until she began filming *Julia* in 1976. Fonda, *Workout Book*, pp. 14-16.

There is no way I can write about health and leave it at urging you to make a personal commitment to nutrition and exercise. [...] The fact is we can only be as healthy as our ecological environment – the one true life-support system [...] we must become aware of how we are being affected by our environment and what actions we can take to protect ourselves, as individuals, as communities, and as part of the whole ecosystem.²⁰

Environmental pollution and women's rights were both key tenets in Hayden's lesser-known monograph, *The American Future: New Visions Beyond Old Frontiers*, and formed part of his political campaign for the California State Assembly in 1982.²¹ Hayden's politics were not explicitly cited in the *Workout Book*, but his image is included in a familial tableau that visually connotes a 'Vote Hayden' campaign (fig. 17). The political dimensions of *The Workout* were thus initially discernible, albeit in a lateral fashion and within a print medium. Maintaining an enduring connection between *The Workout* and its political roots, however, presented challenges given the emerging entrepreneurial slant of Fonda's identity in the wider media.

The popularisation of *The Workout* coincided with and arguably led to Fonda's corporate identity displacing her immediate associations with leftist political movements. Initial media accounts of Fonda's venture into health club entrepreneurship, which preceded the multimedia versions of *The Workout*, offered supportive coverage. In reporting her attempt to reconcile business with activism, the

²⁰ Fonda, *Workout Book*, p. 228.

²¹ Tom Hayden, *The American Future: New Visions Beyond Old Frontiers* (Boston: South End Press, 1980). Hayden also staunchly campaigned for Proposition 65, which, when finally passed, was formally titled 'The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986'.



Figure 17. This photograph introduces part 2 of *Jane Fonda's Workout Book*, p. 25. The chapter is entitled 'Wholly Health'.

Los Angeles Times observed: 'The health clubs were a way to invest her money without playing the stock market, investing in the huge corporations she criticizes, or speculating in real estate, and eventually profits will go to husband Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy. There is nothing incompatible, she says, about political activism and physical activism.'²² Such reports suggested that entrepreneurial activities had the potential to become part of Fonda's political identity. Yet by 1982, the burgeoning success of *The Workout* as a multimedia enterprise had begun to attract political ridicule; a review of the *Workout Book* in the left-leaning periodical *New Republic*, for example, declared: 'Given the phenomenal success of this book and the current fitness craze, it could be that Mrs. Hayden has

²² Jean Cox Penn, 'Fonda and the Fatty Issue', *Los Angeles Times* (27 February 1981), p. 2.

finally found the basis for an authentic American socialism – body worship.’²³ The review also observed ‘body worship is traditionally the province of the political right’ by citing notions of ‘physical purity’ propagated during the rise of Fascism in the first half of the twentieth century; the conclusion was that fitness had ‘little to do with gender and much to do with class’.²⁴ Responses to the release of *JFW*, however, considered gender a central part of Fonda’s impact on fitness culture. In her 1982 article for the *Village Voice*, which included participating in a ‘live’ workout session with Fonda, Jan Hoffman observed: ‘Whether she acknowledges it or not, Fonda is still very much a sex symbol, still perpetrating a stereotype that affects women all over the world, in her movie roles, her coyly suggestive workout video, and even in her V-legged, bottoms-up *Workout* cover pose that confronts hundreds of thousands of fans every day.’²⁵ Politics and sexuality thus remained yardsticks by which the press assessed the evolution of Fonda’s stardom, even when breaking into new forms of media, entertainment, and enterprise.

The unresolved dichotomy of Fonda’s political and sexual personae has persisted throughout her career and the above reportage exhibits this in relation to *The Workout*. Though not explicitly cited, the *New Republic*’s mention of fascistic ‘physical purity’ evoked the infamous Nazi Olympics of 1936; with Los Angeles then scheduled to host the 1984 summer games, *New Republic*’s political criticism of Fonda’s workout image thus also eschewed mainstream enthusiasm for sport and fitness. Likewise, if *The Workout* was a visible dimension of women’s burgeoning fitness culture, then Fonda’s unofficial role as the leader of that movement signalled

²³ Charles Krauthammer, ‘Stretch Marx’, *New Republic* (16 August 1982), p. 30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

²⁵ Jan Hoffman, ‘The Exercist: Jane Fonda Redistributes the Fat of the Land’, *Village Voice* (9 November 1982), p. 16.

an inspirational function unaccounted for by simply categorising her as a sex symbol. As such, the breach between Fonda's political identity and her workout persona cannot be wholly explained by referring to any number of critical journalistic sources. Rather, the failure to reconcile Fonda's activist agenda within *The Workout* within can be discerned by the media development of the concept itself. Originating as an instructional book with a politically environmentalist agenda, *The Workout* was reformatted as an instructional video poised at the ambiguous intersection of physical empowerment and 'body worship' imagery that *New Republic* had cautioned against.

By the end of 1982, *The Workout* occupied three major media, each of which signalled Fonda's fitness persona with an iconic image (fig. 18). Furthermore, through being released as a video, book, and record/cassette, these media emphasised different aspects of Fonda's identity according to the ostensible limits of their form. The main feature of *Jane Fonda's Workout Record*, for example, 'instructions by Jane Fonda', promoted the star's voice and guidance as a form of direct tutelage in how to sculpt the listener's body, accompanied by popular music of the time. The video format, moreover, offered a mode of engagement based on Fonda's voice, body, and movement; *JFW* is structured around audiovisual instruction, with seamless mimicry one of its measures of success. The camerawork, which does not remain in a static 'mirror' position, films Fonda from a variety of angles: these include a wide shot of the entire aerobic studio set with Fonda leading a team co-performers/participants, long shots with Fonda's body in the centre of the frame, long shots of Fonda's body isolated in profile, and the most recurrent shot, in which Fonda addresses the camera directly in a full body pose, typically whilst demonstrating an aerobic exercise. Unlike

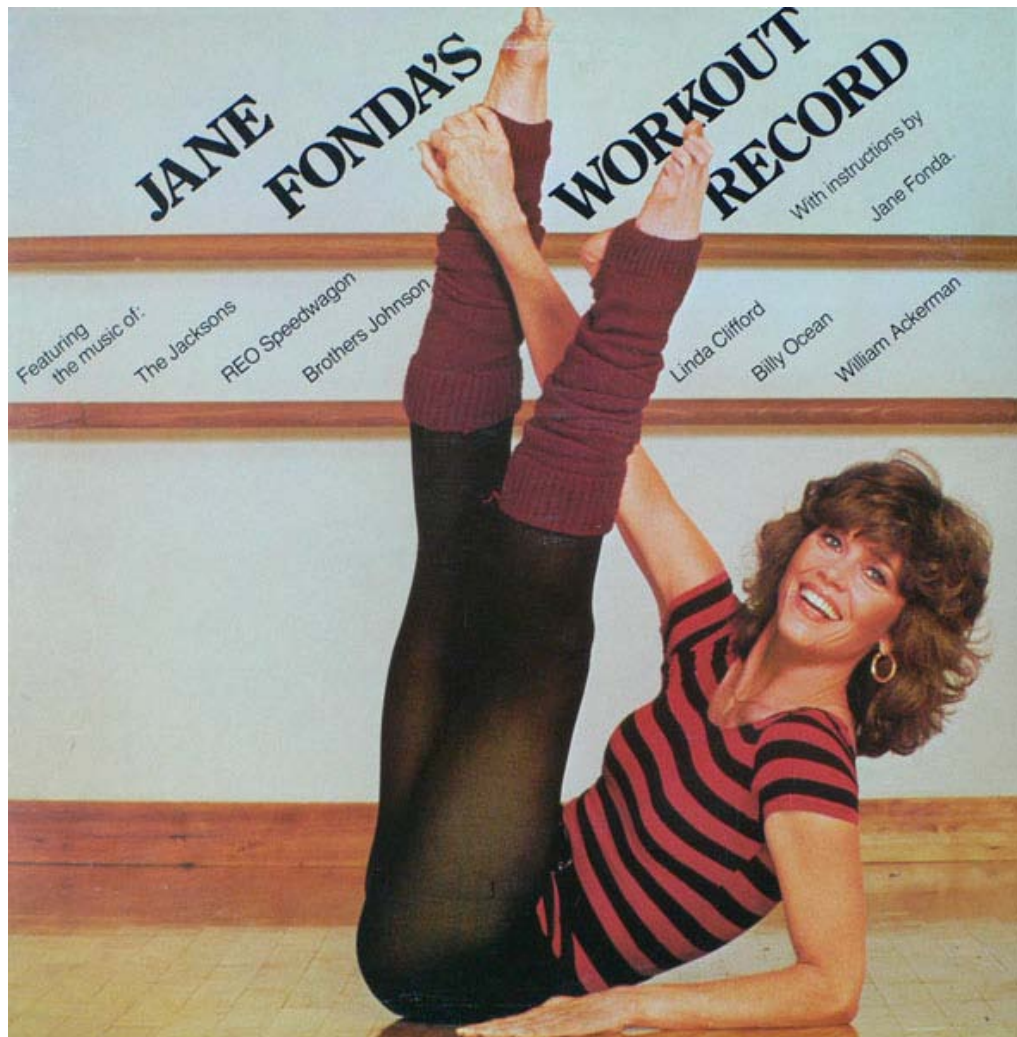


Figure 18. *Jane Fonda's Workout Record* (1981). This image became a multimedia 'brand'.

the *Workout Book*, however, the instructional material of *JFW* was not bracketed by any biographical or, indeed, overtly political content. Rather, by focusing entirely on aerobics, *JFW* operated a comparative self-censorship, imposing limits on its content that it did not otherwise need to given the stated political ambitions of the *Workout Book*. Whereas the *Workout Book* culminated with a raft of political topics, including a brief profile of Luella Kenny and Lois Gibbs – two women mobilised by the Love Canal poisonings – its video version closes with Fonda and her group of co-

performers merely congratulating both the viewer and themselves with enthusiastic applause.²⁶ This decision to ‘de-politicise’ the video version of *The Workout* (despite Fonda alluding to the vast political platform offered by the small screen) implies commercial concerns overrode the inclusion of activist content. This was likely in response to the relatively high retail price of the video (\$59.95), suggesting Fonda’s process of courting a ‘video audience’ – with a certain degree of disposable income – was a cautious affair and conducted using corporate, apolitical strategies.

The closing pages of the *Workout Book* amounted to an environmental health warning, a political message for the future, yet were unmatched by the closing frames of *JFW*, which simply implied the video should be rewound ready for tomorrow’s routine. This pinpoints a notable rupture in Fonda’s commercial-political stardom, with the commercial format of the video eclipsing the political content of the book. Moreover, the increased focus on Fonda’s body in *JFW* has led feminist scholars to suggest that the trope of sexuality previously exhibited by Fonda’s stardom re-emerged via this spectacle. Describing her as ‘one of the most important cultural icons of the fitness industry’, Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw argue: ‘Fonda’s ‘aerobic’ body drew [...] on the earlier construction of Fonda as sex symbol and was a potent sign of the increasing intersection between the discourses of fitness and those of sexuality.’²⁷ Similarly, Elizabeth Kagan and Margaret Morse have identified that the representation of aerobic exercise on video has accumulated instances where a tape ‘falls ambiguously between the category of soft pornography and aerobics by providing fragments of the female body with less informational than erotic value’, although Kagan and Morse do not regard Fonda’s videos as wholly part of this

²⁶ Love Canal was one of America’s most high profile environmental pollution scandals.

²⁷ Jane Arthurs and Jean Grimshaw (eds.), ‘Introduction’, *Women’s Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 6.

phenomenon.²⁸ In actuality, the camerawork in *JFW* does fragment Fonda's body on occasion, including sustained close-ups of her bottom and thighs, and Fonda's vocal lead of the exercises lapses into breathy, exhilarated moments that exhibit a sensual, if not quite sexual timbre. The popularity of *JFW* should not, however, be too casually categorised as a regressive move toward the sexual imagery of Fonda's pre-political stardom as this assumes a form of engagement in spite of Fonda's politicisation rather than because of it. Instead, it is pertinent to consider the meteoric rise of *The Workout* as first being carried by its print campaign, the *Workout Book*, which exhibited a mix of commercial form and political content akin to an IPC film. The evolution of the concept into a video format thereafter demonstrated the shift of Fonda's persona into corporate, entrepreneurial territory consonant with the 1980s, rather than a regressive motion toward 1960s 'free love' sexuality, the historical context for her sex symbol status. In light of all these points, *The Workout* shifted the centre of gravity within Fonda's identity by sublimating her previous personae, repackaged and poised for consumption as a 'video star'.

Throughout the 1980s, Fonda achieved an enhanced level of multimedia stardom thanks to the sustained popularity and strategic dissemination of *The Workout*. Indeed, Fonda appeared in more workout videos than Hollywood films over the course of the decade. These included *Jane Fonda's Prime Time Workout* (1984), *Jane Fonda's New Workout* (1985), and *Jane Fonda's Complete Workout* (1988), amongst others. Whilst an analysis of these videos is beyond the remit of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that Fonda's video stardom did not simply co-exist alongside her film stardom. By cultivating a persona identified simultaneously with

²⁸ Elizabeth Kagan and Margaret Morse, 'The Body Electronic: Aerobic Exercise on Video, Women's Search for Empowerment and Self-Transformation', *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, no. 4 (Winter 1988), p. 175.

the big screen and the small screen, Fonda's stardom occupied an unusual position across and between the two media. Given that the intrinsic allure of Fonda's video stardom ultimately originated from the film stardom that preceded it, the question remains how this multimedia configuration of careers impacted upon her evolving cinematic identity.

The Morning After: video killed the movie star?

The lucrative video stardom cultivated through *The Workout* exemplified Fonda's entrepreneurial prowess and embedded her image within fitness culture of the 1980s. Meanwhile, she appeared in four Hollywood films before retiring from acting in 1990: following the release of *On Golden Pond* in 1981, Fonda starred in *Agnes of God* (1985), *The Morning After* (1986), *Old Gringo* (1989) and *Stanley and Iris* (1989). Adapted from a Broadway play about a nun who gives birth and insists the dead child was the result of a virginal conception, *Agnes of God* garnered a Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress nomination for Anne Bancroft and Meg Tilly respectively in their roles as Mother Superior and Sister Agnes. Fonda's role as psychiatrist Martha Livingston was overlooked. *Old Gringo*, also an adaptation but of a literary source, was set during the Mexican Revolution of the 1910s and co-starred Gregory Peck as the title character.²⁹ *Stanley and Iris*, a working class romantic drama in which Iris (Fonda) teaches Stanley (Robert De Niro) how to read and write, tackled the issue of adult illiteracy in America, yet also made headlines when its location shooting in Waterbury, Connecticut, was disrupted by local war veterans protesting against

²⁹ *Old Gringo* was the one and only Hollywood feature of Fonda Films, the successor to IPC.

Fonda's visit to North Vietnam in 1972.³⁰ All of these projects lacked the political immediacy that defined IPC Films; indeed, the Waterbury protests suggested Fonda's political past was of greater note than its present. In her autobiography, Fonda cursorily distances herself from these films and Hollywood: 'I just didn't want to be [making films] anymore. It was too agonizing. I was experiencing creative disintegration.'³¹ This period of her career certainly appears undefined by a particular role or film; *The Morning After*, however, stands apart given that it earned Fonda a Best Actress Oscar nomination. The film fuses Fonda's strongest acting work of the late-1980s with a spectacle that allows a subversive reading of her career as exhibiting fragmentation – or even 'creative disintegration' to use Fonda's terms – due to the pervasive associations of her video projects. In this regard, *The Morning After* exemplified the tensions at the heart of Fonda's multimedia stardom.

Directed by Sidney Lumet, *The Morning After* alluded to the contradictory status of Fonda's stardom by depicting themes of fractured identity within a thriller format. Set in Los Angeles and exhibiting allusions to film *noir*, *The Morning After* has Fonda play an erstwhile, alcoholic actress that wakes up in bed next to a brutally murdered man. Alex Sternbergen (Fonda) is a blackout drunk, so from the opening scene is unsure of whether she has been framed or is indeed a murderess; the discoveries of the viewer and Fonda's character remain in tandem throughout. After a failed attempt to flee the city, Alex inadvertently crosses paths with a world-weary and bigoted ex-cop ('Turner', played by Jeff Bridges), with whom she becomes romantically involved as they attempt to unravel the truth behind the murder. The pair discovers that her ex-husband, Joaquin (Raul Julia), and his society fiancée, Isabel

³⁰ Nick Ravo, 'Wary Waterbury Waits for "Hanoi Jane" Fonda', *New York Times* (18 December 1987), pp. B1, B8.

³¹ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 458.

(Diane Salinger), have framed Alex for a murder Isabel, in fact, committed. Once exposed, Joaquin attempts to murder Alex and is thwarted by Turner who intervenes heroically. These plot convolutions aside, Alex was a significant character for Fonda because she inhabits a heightened state of crisis and contradiction throughout the narrative. Indeed, making the central character a failed film actress confronted by a series of *noir*-like scenarios is one of the many binaries around which the film is structured.

Films set in the world of filmmaking rarely pass up the opportunity to construct self-reflexive statements on the art and artifice of the industry. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Day of the Locust* (1975), and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), for example, all feature actresses playing actresses who have either been forgotten or are struggling to break into Hollywood filmmaking. In *The Morning After*, Alex's displacement from the acting world through alcoholism eliminates the possibility of depicting a broader film culture beyond her characterisation, thus making Alex/Fonda the primary mechanism for textual self-reflection. This pronounced focus on Alex – an actress played by an actress – enhances the inter-textual possibilities of her characterisation within the film, which is, furthermore, suffused with symbolism relevant to Fonda's contemporaneous image from the outset.

Various dimensions of Fonda's stardom and identity are implied by the opening scenes of *The Morning After*, which exhibit a subversive use of *mise-en-scène*. The first shot of the film's ten minute pre-credit sequence is tightly focused on a television set, so as to make the edges of the television screen and the cinematic frame virtually indistinguishable. What follows on the television screen – whilst still

comprising the first shot of the film – is a rapid introductory sequence to a lifestyle programme called ‘Eye on LA’ featuring a montage of muscles flexing, fragmented framed female bodies engaged in resistance exercises, and women bodybuilders.³² ‘Photography, modelling, and pumping iron – are they combining into a new kind of soft porn?’ asks a television narrator, who proceeds to announce the show’s fictitious ‘special guest’, a photographer named Bobby Korshack, described to be on the boundaries of this debate. Meanwhile, the camera zooms out from the television set, pans rightward and downward to reveal Korshack himself, dead, and in bed with Alex, who is emerging into consciousness. As the camera pans rightward to fully encompass Alex’s body, the television narrator announces ‘let’s meet the “always controversial” Bobby Korshack’ – a witty allusion to Fonda’s reputation for controversy amidst a sequence referencing her associations with fitness culture more broadly. As Alex stirs, Korshack is interviewed on the television screen out of shot. Noticing blood on her hands and the bed sheets, Alex lurches backward out of shot, at which point the film employs the first cut thus far to reveal her point-of-view of Korshack’s corpse.

Given Fonda’s relationship with contemporaneous fitness culture, this protracted first shot of *The Morning After* constituted a loaded citation of her video stardom. Indeed, a *Vanity Fair* article from 1988 reported that Fonda ‘thought it would be misinterpreted either as criticism of her own workout enthusiasm or as some sort of reconsideration on her part of fitness ideology’; Sidney Lumet, the article explained, decided the sequence should remain in the film.³³ Similarly, a major decision Fonda negotiated with Lumet was changing the setting of the film to Los

³² ‘Eye on LA’ was a local programme that screened on ABC’s local network between 1980 and 1987.

³³ Ron Rosenbaum, ‘Dangerous Jane’, *Vanity Fair* (November 1988), p. 212.

Angeles, rather than New York, Lumet's preferred location.³⁴ Again, in hindsight, this was a mixed blessing as the Los Angeles setting created an opportunity for Lumet to import the 'body worship' opening sequence with stronger creative license given the prevalence of this culture in Southern California. As the first shot of the film, the 'Eye on LA' segment functions as an unorthodox but nonetheless effective establishing shot for *The Morning After*, before Alex ventures out into the sun bleached streets of Los Angeles proper. It suggests representing 'Los Angeles' cinematically could be impishly achieved by combining the sculpted female body and the television screen – a configuration also connoting Fonda's entrepreneurial success during the 1980s. These creative differences were not wholly representative of Fonda and Lumet's working relationship, which had, in fact, been keenly anticipated by both parties and remained fruitful throughout making the film.³⁵ Rather, if the opening shot of *The Morning After* struck Fonda as an potential indictment of her video stardom, then the inclusion of the sequence in the final cut was ultimately an indication that she no longer possessed a power of veto over the use and abuse of her cinematic image.³⁶

The inter-textual dimensions of *The Morning After* are acutely defined by the pre-credit sequence and develop more evenly thereafter. As a series of plot points, this ten minute segment depicts Alex waking up with Korshack's corpse, exploring his apartment, calling Joaquin ('Jackie') to seek his advice, and finally leaving the scene of the crime to find her way home. Visually, however, the sequence implies Fonda's

³⁴ Joan Goodman, 'Who's Inside That Perfect Body?', *New Woman* (January 1987), p. 54.

³⁵ Goodman, 'Jane Fonda', p. 78. Lumet had historic ties with the Fonda family, having been handpicked by Henry to make his directorial debut with *12 Angry Men* (1957) which was also the one and only film Henry Fonda produced.

³⁶ Notably, *The Morning After* was originally on the development slate of IPC before going into production through American Filmworks, the company Bruce Gilbert founded after the dissolution of IPC. This suggests that Gilbert, who offered robust support to Fonda in the story conferences of *Coming Home*, may have shown less interest in how Fonda's stardom was represented in *The Morning After*. The episode may also be the simple case of Lumet exercising directorial privilege given his powerful status in Hollywood.

incongruent dual status as a movie star and video star, thus enlarging the ambiguous dimensions of the film's first shot. In a series of POV and reaction shots, for example, the viewer both inhabits Alex's perspective and observes her reactions to seeing Korshack simultaneously 'alive' on the television screen and dead in front of her. While this sequence embellishes the identity of the murder victim for narrative purposes, the editing and *mise-en-scène* also represent the television screen as a harbinger of death; Alex glances with horror from Korshack's corpse to his image just as he states 'I'm proud of what I am doing', suggesting the fixed parameters of the television set have become a tomb, exaggerated by the now wider cinematic frame. Indeed, faced with Korshack's animated television image, Alex reaches out nervously, uttering to the corpse 'is that one of those trick...[knives]?' before swiftly affirming that it is not. This reveals Alex's tendency to view the world as an actress through her assumption, albeit fleeting, that Korshack's corpse is a product of movie trickery and special effects. Faced with Korshack's image entombed in the television screen – a further indictment of 'small screen' stardom – and his body brutalised before her, Alex can no longer deny the reality of the murder and bursts out of the bedroom into the glare of a white photographic studio. The extreme long shot that follows both dwarves her and suggests her powerlessness amidst this apparatus of 'image construction'. As she moves further toward the camera, the lighting reveals the extent to which Fonda is playing against her looks, suggesting the motif of faded Hollywood glamour: Alex is a heavy drinker and it shows. After imbibing more alcohol in the kitchen area of the studio, Alex runs into the bathroom to vomit, then stands in front of a bulb-lined mirror – the archetypal symbol of 'dressing room stardom' – and utters to her mirror image, sarcastically, 'congratulations'.

The unsettling use of screens and mirrors in its opening sequence signals *The Morning After*'s generic affinity with film *noir* yet accumulates more precise meanings when placed in the context of Fonda's stardom. Having Korshack's television image proclaim 'I'm proud of what I am doing' to his own corpse followed by Alex 'congratulating' her mirror image are two early instances of the film's use of binaries. Alex embodies a fractured identity over the course of the narrative; she fluctuates between sobriety and drunkenness, fabricates personal crises in her attempt to flee Los Angeles and also, notably, is known to some cameo characters by her 'screen name' of Viveca Van Loren (interestingly, the characters familiar with Viveca frequent the seedier locations of the city, suggesting Viveca was, at best, a B-movie star). Duality also features significantly within the narrative climax: Alex has Jackie dye her hair from blonde to brunette – a visual motif bound up with Fonda's abandonment of her Barbarella image – and she subsequently realises Jackie has framed her, precipitating his attempt on her life. Indeed, coding Alex/Viveca's development through appearance further intensifies the dynamism of Fonda playing the part, given that her transformation from blonde to brunette, intended as a disguise, actually functions to 'reveal' an image which unmistakably looks like the 'real' (brunette) Jane Fonda of the time. At the film's end, Alex has not only committed to stay sober but also dresses much more conservatively as a brunette – and more like Fonda in the contemporaneous media – suggesting that the chaotic existence Viveca/blonde Alex represented has ostensibly been resolved.

The entire narrative of *The Morning After* is predicated on an overarching binary, namely Alex's crippling amnesia versus what she actually remembers. Her amnesia deems Alex a potential aggressor and this is the major theme of the film that

remains ambiguous, given that she must rely on the exposure of other characters' motives rather than her own individual recollection of events. In this regard, Alex's identity exists in half-light throughout the narrative until the climactic scene when Jackie tries to drown her in his bathtub, at which point the roles of aggressor and victim are decisively drawn. The binary of memory and amnesia, moreover, has a notable function when placed in the wider context of Fonda's stardom and identity, and it is this particular tension that enhances the otherwise predictable denouement of *The Morning After*. If the opening of the film constructs an ostensible critique of Fonda's small screen stardom, then Jackie's fabrication of Alex's murder anticipates the forthcoming movement of right-wing groups to indict Fonda with 'anti-war crimes' she did not, in fact, commit. Indeed, the resurgence of 'Hanoi Jane' propaganda in the late-1980s relied on a relative amount of collective amnesia and mythmaking in order to depict Fonda as an aggressor.³⁷

Jackie's failure to drown Alex may ostensibly appear to exonerate the character, but the imagery connotes a broader framework of hostility. In her analysis of *Fatal Attraction* (1987), feminist writer Joan Smith identifies the recurring motif of water in the film, culminating with the attempted bathtub drowning of Alex Forrest (Glenn Close), whom Smith describes as 'a witch, the undrownable [*sic*] woman'.³⁸ Moreover, Smith explicitly recounts '[t]he theory behind the practice of "swimming" witches was simple and brutal: if a woman came up to the surface and survived the ordeal, it proved her command of the black arts and she would be punished

³⁷ Mary Hershberger summarises her extensive research of this phenomenon in the following terms: 'The myths about Jane Fonda, originating in the Nixon White House and incubated on the far right of the political spectrum, slowly permeated military culture both in active-duty and veterans' organizations, then emerged in the late-1980s in a full-throated roar.' Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, p. 110.

³⁸ Joan Smith, *Misogynies* (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 27.

accordingly.’³⁹ Punishment is administered in *Fatal Attraction* by the wronged wife, in defence of her adulterous husband. Like her namesake in *Fatal Attraction*, Alex survives her trial by drowning in *The Morning After*; outside the world of the film, however, Fonda was accused of betraying her country by right-wing American war veterans and encountered retribution through her backlash persona – ‘Hanoi Jane’, the ‘witch’ of the anti-war movement.

The contemporaneous impact of *The Morning After* was principally defined by Fonda’s accomplished performance and the industrial recognition this received.⁴⁰ Alex was a complex enough role for Fonda to explore its many facets; she spent time at Alcoholics Anonymous and researched the lives of former actresses like Gail Russell and Frances Farmer, both of whom had severe drinking problems.⁴¹ In this regard, Fonda’s research echoed her time spent with call girls when working on *Klute*. Moreover, the imagery and *mise-en-scène* of *The Morning After*, especially that of its opening and closing passages, elicited meaning for the extremes of Fonda’s identity during the 1980s, just as *Klute* provided a context for analysing her activism during the 1970s. Having cultivated a career in fitness that effectively obscured her political identity,⁴² Fonda’s anti-war activism lurched back into public focus in 1987 when proposed location shooting for *Stanley and Iris*, then provisionally titled *Union Street*, received vehement local opposition from war veterans. *The Morning After* thus exemplified the contradictory features of Fonda’s stardom through both its

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fonda’s nomination for Best Actress was the only notable accolade the film received.

⁴¹ Goodman, ‘Who’s Inside That Perfect Body?’, p. 54.

⁴² Fonda told *New Woman* magazine: ‘The only thing that bothers me a little bit is that young people view me as an exercise guru – and they don’t know anything about Vietnam. I wasn’t making any movies at the time [of becoming a fitness entrepreneur], and people who didn’t know me would talk to me about the workout videotape and not about films.’ Fonda quoted in Goodman, ‘Who’s Inside That Perfect Body?’, p. 54.

representational dimensions and also its temporal positioning between the popularisation of *The Workout* and a resurgence of the 'Hanoi Jane' backlash.

Reinventing 'Hanoi Jane'

The right-wing backlash Fonda experienced during the late-1980s is a counter-intuitive trend given that she had publicly edged closer to the centre left of American politics.⁴³ Her status as a nationally admired figure also registered highly according to pollsters.⁴⁴ The question remains, therefore, how and why Fonda became the subject of a backlash, and what factors informed this climate of vilification. Providing a robust explanation necessitates identifying individual historical moments within Fonda's career, such as the Waterbury protest campaign and its associated fallout, as well as the shifting cultural and political paradigms affecting American women more broadly. The confluence of these elements suggests Fonda was not only drawn into an ideological fray regarding Vietnam but that her image became a contested symbol regarding the past and present positioning of the conflict within the national consciousness.

The reinterpretation of Fonda's anti-war activism, in particular her time spent in North Vietnam, has received notable scholarly attention. In her wider study of the American military, Carol Burke identifies that Fonda's meetings with American POWs have taken on mythic status: 'revisionist tales lay blame where the tellers and

⁴³ Joan Goodman pertinently described Fonda being 'haunted' by her radical past: 'She still gets hate mail from right-wingers, and recently some legislators in Sacramento suggested that Hayden should be impeached for his radical views. In fact, Fonda and Hayden have moved [...] toward the center of Democratic party politics.' Goodman, 'Who's Inside That Perfect Body?', p. 55.

⁴⁴ A *Chicago Tribune* article from 1985 reports Fonda ranking as the fourth most admired American woman in a contemporaneous Gallup poll. Julia Cameron, 'Jane Fonda is Right Where She Wants to Be: On Top of the World', *Chicago Tribune* (8 September 1985), p. 4.

their audiences would have it rest: on Fonda as the deliberate agent of torture. Although she didn't tighten the ropes and inflict the blows herself, she is somehow their direct cause.'⁴⁵ This desire to malign Fonda's Vietnam journey retrospectively is also challenged in Mary Hershberger's political biography, *Jane Fonda's War*, which, through extensive primary source research, debunks erroneous rumours in circulation to date.⁴⁶ The explanations offered by both scholars regarding why Fonda became the target of such right-wing hostility provide key observations in relation to gender history. Burke concludes that Fonda's pre-politicised sexual allure was inextricably linked to longstanding patterns of misogyny: 'The ever available, innocent Barbarella had transformed herself into Hanoi Jane, an outspoken critic of the war. The figure of a woman who appears to be one thing but turns out to be something more sinister or monstrous inhabits centuries of folklore.'⁴⁷ Hershberger's account, largely commendable for its corrective accomplishments regarding historical myths, suggests: 'The single-minded relentless pursuit of Fonda by right-wing demagogues may seem less singular when viewed over the course of American history. Indeed, a personalized anger against women who speak out against violence and war is a distinct thread throughout American history.'⁴⁸ Citing experiences of women who opposed Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the slander directed at Jane Addams after she travelled to Europe in 1915 to condemn the bloodshed there as 'an old man's war', Hershberger thus locates Fonda's vilification as symptomatic of a recurring historical cycle.⁴⁹ Moreover, the 'Hanoi Jane' phenomenon acquired mythic dimensions during the late-1980s, a period when American women were enduring a

⁴⁵ Burke, *Camp All-American*, p. 181.

⁴⁶ A major rumour is that American POWs who refused to meet with Fonda were tortured as punishment. In many cases the particular POW at the centre of rumour intervened to debunk such spurious claims. See Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, pp. 182-185.

⁴⁷ Burke, *Camp All-American*, p. 186.

⁴⁸ Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, p. 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

social, cultural, and political backlash in response to the perceived gains achieved by the women's movement of the 1970s. This latter point is the essence of Susan Faludi's *Backlash* thesis, which provides a contextual framework for deciphering the resurgence and pervasiveness of 'Hanoi Jane' mythology.

The high visibility of Fonda's politics and stardom during the 1970s and '80s connected her with a number of social issues, not least that of the women's movement. In *Backlash*, Faludi suggests the media manipulatively represented feminism during the 1980s by circulating journalism predicated on fictitious 'trends' rather than facts, such as working women experiencing loneliness, burnout, and even infertility resulting from economic and social emancipation. Concurrently, the media asserted (erroneously) that women were abandoning the workplace and returning to more 'traditional' pursuits of homemaking and childrearing. The duplicity of this kind of reporting, Faludi argues, was the implication that 'having it all' was, in fact, a feminist's poison chalice.⁵⁰ Fonda's media presence amidst these journalistic trends inhabits a contradictory realm. Her 'working wife and mother' image was hitherto long established and Fonda's entrepreneurial activities received sustained attention via coverage of *The Workout*.⁵¹ This reportage was further consolidated through profiles suggesting she had successfully reconciled her 'conflicting' identities of wife, mother, activist and businesswoman; Fonda, it seemed, could 'have it all' and the media remained on side by depicting this.⁵² Within Faludi's broader backlash tapestry

⁵⁰ Faludi, *Backlash*, pp. 75-111.

⁵¹ See, for example, Blair Sabol, 'What's Going On: Jane Fonda Talks About Energy, Exercise, Herself', *Mademoiselle* (March 1980), pp. 38, 40; Leo Janos, 'Jane Fonda: Finding Her Golden Pond', *Cosmopolitan* (January 1985), pp. 168-171, 205.

⁵² 'Having it all' was ambiguously framed via Fonda's image, however. *Vogue* marvelled at her ability to combine 'looks and wisdom', whereas entertainment weekly *Billboard* remarked on her 'remarkable' work-life balance. Janice Kaplan, 'Fonda On: Fit After Forty' *Vogue* (February 1985), pp. 374, 404; Michele Willens, 'Jane Fonda: A More Personal View', *Billboard* (31 August 1985), pp. F6, F19, F21.

therefore, Fonda initially embodied a showbiz exception to the media's general rule that women had to choose between work and home. In this regard, Fonda represented a powerful figure, a woman who had benefitted from the women's movement of the 1970s in a public and visible fashion. When she subsequently came under attack by right-wing war veterans, the hostility was a cocktail of vitriol against Fonda as both an activist and a successful career woman; expressing disdain for Fonda became an extreme yet socially charged ideological position.

If Fonda's notable success as an actress and entrepreneur during the 1980s represented high-profile possibilities for women in America, then the protestations that followed connoted corresponding male fears. Faludi suggests the decade started significantly, as '1980 was the year the U.S. Census officially stopped defining the head of household as the husband'.⁵³ Fonda was the conspicuous breadwinner in her household and also held court with the American public through her established media persona.⁵⁴ Such leadership befitted the star, according to contemporaneous journalist Gail Sheehy, who recounted in a 'Hers' column of the *New York Times* from 1980 'she has killed off "Hanoi Jane" and won the hearts and minds of Good Housekeeping America'.⁵⁵ In assessing the future prospects of this recuperation, Sheehy wrote presciently:

Let's hope nothing ever again threatens a political climate that allows Jane Fonda to put across her messages in films like *The China Syndrome* and *Coming Home*. Let's hope she will respond in kind, by recognizing there is

⁵³ Faludi, *Backlash*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ In a 20/20 interview broadcast in 1985, Fonda revealed to Barbara Walters that Hayden regularly made light of the disparity between their incomes by telling California voters that the economic inequality he sought he campaigned to alleviate existed in his own home.

⁵⁵ Gail Sheehy, 'Women and Leadership: Jane Fonda', *New York Times* (10 January 1980), p. C2.

something dangerous about a leader of opinion – whether on the left or the right – who never publicly modifies the excesses of her past.⁵⁶

By the mid-1980s, Fonda's cinematic messages were drifting wide of her activist agenda and the political climate had indeed become more threatening. Faludi's study provides a useful context through its revelations regarding the nature of that threat against American women. Specifically, Faludi asserts: 'Once a society projects its fears onto a female form, it can try to cordon off those fears by controlling women – pushing them to conform to comfortingly nostalgic norms.'⁵⁷ Chelsea in *On Golden Pond* constituted a conservative, nostalgic vision of Fonda that the star willingly embodied; a career-oriented woman, Chelsea is nonetheless the insecure, misunderstood daughter of Norman/Henry. By the latter half of the 1980s, Henry had passed on and Fonda's entrepreneurship was upwardly spiralling. It is telling, therefore, that a full-frontal assault on her identity should incorporate both her acting career and her political past, the two key sources of Fonda's ongoing power and visibility.

The Waterbury protests over the proposed location shooting of *Stanley and Iris* during 1988 function as an equivocal centrepiece for the 'Hanoi Jane' resurgence. Notably, this individual controversy commenced the year before Fonda had set foot in the working class Connecticut town. Hershberger describes how a local World War II veteran and leader of the Waterbury Veterans of Foreign Wars [VFW] faction, Gaetano 'Guy' Russo, wrote an outraged letter to the *Waterbury Republican* newspaper in response to hearing of Fonda's proposed visit under the auspices of the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Faludi, *Backlash*, p. 70.

film. He appealed to Waterbury residents to not provide ‘comfort and support for Jane Fonda’ and the *Republican* received a second wave of letters from VFW members asserting that Fonda’s visit constituted a direct insult to veterans.⁵⁸ Hershberger’s account places heavy emphasis on the VFW by identifying how Russo’s letter was bolstered by a nationwide consortium of VFW faction’s responses echoing his objection raised with the *Republican*. Unrepresentative of Waterbury residents as a whole, for whom the location filming represented at least an economic benefit, the VFW letters magnified in censoriousness and even included a spurious claim that a Vietnam POW, John McCain (who would later contend the 2008 presidency), was savagely beaten because of his refusal to meet with Fonda during her Hanoi visit.⁵⁹ Hershberger’s identification of the right-wing spark that ignited this campaign is undoubtedly significant, yet charting how the mainstream media inflamed this controversy is also imperative and reveals a notable shift in emphasis.

While exposing the intricacies of such ostensibly ‘grassroots’ campaigns is crucial, the national dimensions of how Russo’s campaign was constructed as a media event in and of itself should be noted in context. Firstly, despite embodying mainstream values of the 1980s through her entrepreneurial activities, Fonda’s media coverage veered into controversial episodes with some regularity. This occurred within national politics in 1983 when the Democratic National Convention edited out Fonda’s portions of their Memorial Day telethon after her appearance generated hundreds of hostile telephone call and letters: ‘Apparently many still think of her in the role of the left-wing activist who visited Hanoi, and not that of the physically fit liberal she now plays. Says one DNC official, “it’s as if they saw Jane Fonda on the

⁵⁸ See Hershberger, *Jane Fonda’s War*, pp. 177-179.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

screen and suddenly it was the '60s again [*sic*].”⁶⁰ While her image evoked hyperbolic flashbacks, merchandise associated with *The Workout* – undeniably part of the contemporaneous decade – was also targeted by politicised consumers. Stores carrying Jane Fonda Workout and Active Wear via the distributor Capri Beachwear experienced threatening telephone calls and protests citing her political past.⁶¹ Fonda’s activities in Hollywood, meanwhile, remained quite robust. Trade papers linked her to starring roles in *Straight Talk*, *Jagged Edge* and *The Accused*, plus an unrealised apartheid project starring opposite Sidney Poitier as Nelson Mandela.⁶² Indeed, given Faludi’s claims that career women were undermined during the late-1980s, the backlash against Fonda appears to be because of, rather than in spite of, her visibility. The protests against location shooting for *Stanley and Iris* therefore attacked the foundations of Fonda’s place in visual culture by embellishing and indicting her past.

The media’s grandstanding of Guy Russo’s crusade exemplified how Fonda’s identity had become a contentious symbol existing apart from her mainstream stardom. Moreover, Russo’s letter, which Hershberger argues the other VFW members supported, was not the tipping point for activities in Waterbury acquiring the status of national news. Days after writing to the *Republican*, he abbreviated – and quite literally mobilised – his protest by printing 250 bumper stickers reading ‘I’m

⁶⁰ The '60s were evidently used here as a byword for activist movements encompassing both the 1960s and 1970s, the latter being when Fonda was most prominent and her Hanoi visit specifically occurring in 1972. Eric Gelman, ‘Jane Fonda Fails an Audition’, *Newsweek* (29 August 1983), p. 13.

⁶¹ The Workout clothing line was also alleged to have caused Capri to declare bankruptcy. Neal Koch, ‘In Exercise Clothes, Fonda’s a Flop’, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (2 August 1984), pp. 7, 10.

⁶² *Straight Talk*, a comedic portrait of an agony aunt radio presenter, languished until 1992. Dolly Parton – Fonda’s protégée whom had made her movie debut with *Nine to Five* – eventually played the lead. Glenn Close starred in *Jagged Edge* (1985) opposite Jeff Bridges, whose involvement in *The Morning After* may have precluded Fonda playing this part. Kelly McGillis played what would have been Fonda’s role in *The Accused* (1988), having made an impact as the female lead in *Top Gun* (1986).

Not Fond'a [*sic*] Hanoi Jane'. Waterbury's other daily newspaper, the *American*, published an accompanying article, which was then followed up nationally by coverage released through The Associated Press; this AP reportage 'touched off a barrage of letters and telephone calls from around the nation'.⁶³ The bumper sticker campaign, speculatively given a national media platform by the AP, also succeeded in refracting focus back onto Russo's original letter as the well-spring of a supposedly 'spontaneous' set of grassroots objections. Accordingly, even quotes from Waterbury residents fatigued by the furore were framed in a manner that seemed to dignify Russo's initial gesture: 'One letter to the editor and now all this,' recounted Anthony Bergin, the chairman of Waterbury's Convention and Visitors Commission. While Bergin had expressed his sentiments incredulously, the *New York Times* article in which he was quoted had nevertheless positioned Russo as 'the leader of a nationwide anti-Jane Fonda movement', thus implying that 'one letter to the editor' represented the actions of a pseudo-populist hero.⁶⁴ The article's closing gambit inflated this aspect further by suggesting battle lines had been drawn regarding Fonda; with Waterbury's Mayor and Congressman opposing her visit, the article concluded that taking a stand either way constituted a quintessentially American decision: 'It will be a great example of democracy in action.'⁶⁵

The Waterbury controversy is better considered a visible symptom rather than a major cause of how 'Hanoi Jane' mythology acquired momentum during the late-1980s. Hershberger provides a useful account of Fonda's eventual visit to Waterbury and the partial resolution she achieved through meeting some veterans in a local

⁶³ Ravo, 'Wary Waterbury Waits for "Hanoi Jane" Fonda', p. B1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. B8.

⁶⁵ Bergin quoted in Ravo, 'Wary Waterbury Waits for "Hanoi Jane" Fonda', p. B8.

church setting.⁶⁶ Yet the controversy that Russo's letter and bumper sticker campaign elicited indicates not just an instance of the mythic embroidering of Fonda's activism but also the underlying desire for a landmark 'event' around which anti-Fonda sentiment could cluster, having lurched into partial view earlier in the decade. In this regard, the ostensible 'spontaneity' surrounding the Waterbury controversy – which the *New York Times* reported as 'democracy in action' – should be treated with suspicion and aligned with Faludi's *Backlash* thesis and other pernicious aspects of contemporaneous popular culture. Hershberger, for example, argues that the reactionary POW Hollywood feature entitled *The Hanoi Hilton* (1987) created a climate of resentment against Fonda that 'tipped over' in Waterbury some months after its initial release.⁶⁷ The film is set in a North Vietnamese prison compound nicknamed the Hanoi Hilton by its American inmates and some way into the narrative, after an unspoken bond of universal suffering has been established through various cinematic devices (cross-cutting between cells; stoic silences), a cameo character visits the Hanoi Hilton. Paula (Gloria Carlin), a young, attractive woman, arrives amidst a throng of media activity, denoting her status as an American celebrity. Styled counter-culturally, speaking fluent French, and awkwardly using the peace sign when posing for photographs, she even embraces the North Vietnamese prison governor when he tells her he intends to parole a few prisoners. The character is also flanked by two men, one of whom resembles Hayden, despite Fonda having travelled alone in 1972. This thinly veiled, mendacious depiction of Fonda's visit to POWs in North Vietnam 'as a naïve, wilfully ignorant woman who is obviously a traitor' was one of *The Hanoi Hilton*'s illegitimate legacies, Hershberger claims; the film 'had limited popular appeal, but it was widely shown to veterans groups and at

⁶⁶ Hershberger, *Jane Fonda's War*, pp. 178-181.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

the annual gatherings organized by hard-line POWs'.⁶⁸ The film's exacerbation of 'Hanoi Jane' mythology is indeed crudely executed and Hershberger's assessment of its longer term impact thus suggests its 'cult' status amongst right-wing veterans and their sympathisers. Having opened on just two screens in March 1987, however, *The Hanoi Hilton* was a decidedly minor film and so, like *Waterbury*, cannot precisely account for the sustained climate of suspicion against Fonda. Rather, the overall cycle of Vietnam cinema to which this film belongs constituted the broader indicator of Fonda's relationship to Vietnam in the revisionist national imaginary.

The Second Coming of Vietnam

Hollywood's second wave of features representing Vietnam and its veterans during the mid to late-1980s challenged the recuperative dimensions of *Coming Home*. Specifically, the Vietnam films that were released during this period effectively clawed back the rehabilitative gains Fonda had achieved through IPC's vision. There is, of course, a vast critical literature on Vietnam cinema, and this cycle of films imparted contrasting political viewpoints and ideologies, as well as differing artistically.⁶⁹ A concise point that sums up the opposing visions generated by these films is made by scholar Harry Haines, who argues that the simplicity of certain reactionary Vietnam films actually generated the ostensible complexity of films that followed shortly thereafter: '*Rambo* [1985] helped generate the circumstances in which *Platoon* [1986] could win popular acceptance as the "real" story of Vietnam.'⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The following edited collections incorporate a range of approaches to both the first wave and second wave cycles of Hollywood cinema. See, for example, Dittmar and Michaud (eds.), *From Hanoi to Hollywood* and Michael Anderegg (ed.), *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television*.

⁷⁰ Harry W. Haines, "'They Were Called and They Went': The Political Rehabilitation of the Vietnam Veteran', in Dittmar and Michaud, *From Hanoi to Hollywood*, p. 91.

Oliver Stone's 'authorship' of *Platoon* was also signalled by his status as an actual veteran of the conflict. Marita Sturken has noted: 'It is impossible to separate Stone's films from his personal history. [...] His films reveal a contradiction between the desire to know completely the stories of history and a stylistic excess that acknowledges the role of fantasy in that knowing.'⁷¹ The 'authenticity' of *Platoon* thus rested on being favourably compared to the likes of *Rambo*; as Yvonne Tasker has argued, '*Rambo* has been repeatedly used to define the quality of other Vietnam movies, broadly along the lines of an opposition between realism and comic-book fantasy.'⁷² Stone's vision received major recognition from the Academy; *Platoon* won Best Picture and Best Director, notably matching the achievements of *The Deer Hunter* (1978) against which *Coming Home* had competed industrially, and in a more subtle way, ideologically, regarding the legacy of Vietnam.⁷³ Yet as political cinema Haines identifies that '*Platoon* decontextualizes [*sic*] the ideological crisis it represents'.⁷⁴ Indeed, the apparent disparity between *Rambo* and *Platoon* reduces significantly when considering the 'ring fenced' male experiences each offers; the motifs of 'revisionist victory' and 'innocence lost' in these films operate on a masculine binary of triumph and tragedy, detouring representations of female identities.

Transmuting Oliver Stone's involvement in Vietnam into Hollywood cinema indicated a renewed cultural interest in participatory narrative accounts of the conflict. Whereas Fonda's experiences translated into the strategic fusion of political

⁷¹ Marita Sturken, 'Reenactment, Fantasy and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone's Docudramas', *History and Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4 (December 1997), p. 65.

⁷² Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 93-94.

⁷³ This ceremony also included Fonda's Best Actress nomination for *The Morning After*.

⁷⁴ Haines, 'The Political Rehabilitation of the Vietnam Veteran', p. 93.

filmmaking with commercial schema in a home front narrative, Stone's 'eyewitness' credentials were more bombastically employed; Fonda, nonetheless, openly supported *Platoon*. Suggesting *Platoon* was potentially 'the middle movie of a Vietnam trilogy – for which *Coming Home* [...] could be the end',⁷⁵ Fonda also asserted that cinema could engage America in the lessons of history: 'I'm still waiting for a movie that explains why we were there at all – why it all happened.'⁷⁶ Openly critical of *Rambo*, too, she accused the film of obscuring the truth and even attacked Sylvester Stallone by noting that during her activist period he was teaching at a Swiss girls' school.⁷⁷ Responses to Fonda's support for *Platoon* in the *Los Angeles Times* letters section were roundly hostile and one correspondent expressed anger at her burgeoning exercise career given some of his friends were disfigured or disabled veterans. While Stone and Stallone denoted the polarities for representing Vietnam as 'reality' or fantasy, Fonda's mobilised, activist involvement in the war became a controversial touchstone for reactionaries who conflated her gender and previous political affiliations in their rejection of her identity. Fonda dismissed *Rambo* and admired Stone's film, yet accounts of women's experiences were decidedly absent; Stone's work did nothing to halt the 'Hanoi Jane' mythmaking and in some ways actually exacerbated this phenomenon.

Hollywood's second wave of Vietnam cinema enhanced the anti-Fonda campaign and exhibited key features of the broader backlash against women in popular culture. Faludi identifies that macho characters and narratives in books, television and cinema experienced a renaissance during the latter half of the 1980s,

⁷⁵ Pat Broeske, 'After Seeing *Platoon*, Fonda Wept', *Los Angeles Times Calendar* (25 January 1987), Jane Fonda Clippings Collection, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, USA [hereafter JFCC/AMPAS].

⁷⁶ Fonda quoted in Broeske, 'After Seeing *Platoon*, Fonda Wept', JFCC/AMPAS.

⁷⁷ Broeske, 'After Seeing *Platoon*, Fonda Wept', JFCC/AMPAS.

which she attributes to a shift of male attitudes toward women's rights – from progressive to conservative. This coincided with, and is contextualised by, a gender voting gap that emerged during this period, the first of its kind in American history.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Faludi's argument is preceded and laterally supported by a more specific study of sexual difference in literary and cinematic representations of Vietnam. In *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, which examines wartime and post-war novels, memoirs, and films, amongst other media, Susan Jeffords contends: 'The defining feature of American war narratives is that they are a "man's story" from which women are generally excluded.'⁷⁹ *Coming Home* provided a notable alternative to this phenomenon; moreover, Fonda's involvement in the conflict proper as an activist who campaigned on the home front and, more contentiously, behind enemy lines, were historical episodes in their own right. Second wave Vietnam films thus subverted Fonda's recuperative arc away from 'Hanoi Jane' and dismantled her place within the conflict's history in various subtle ways. Whereas *The Hanoi Hilton* launched a spurious assault on Fonda's activism and identity, other films closed ranks through representations of all-male narratives. Female characters fared poorly if represented at all; Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War* (1989), for example, depicts the protracted torture, rape and murder of a Vietnamese village girl at the hands of a crazed American reconnaissance unit. Given De Palma's trend of brutalising women in his films (e.g. *Dressed to Kill* [1980], *Body Double* [1984]), the anti-war subtext – resting largely with the moral conscience of the character played by Michael J. Fox – is clouded by the unblinking eye of this director's camera.

⁷⁸ Faludi, *Backlash*, pp. 60-65.

⁷⁹ Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 49.

Oliver Stone's Vietnam films of the '80s exhibit a host of tendencies in excluding female subjectivity and centring male experiences within ostensibly 'authentic' cinema. *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), based on Ron Kovic's memoirs, is the consummate example as this film went the furthest in subverting the legacy of *Coming Home*, arguably the Vietnam film which had presented thus far the most complex female role. Firstly, *Born on the Fourth of July* [herein *July*] immerses itself in a male perspective, predicated on what Peter C. Rollins terms the 'corruption of innocence' motif in his discussion of Vietnam-inspired books, such as Philip Caputo's *A Rumour of War* (1977) and Robert Mason's *Chickenhawk* (1983).⁸⁰ Secondly, having Tom Cruise play Kovic imported his associations with the action genre, exemplified by *Top Gun* (the most successful film of 1986); this, suggested Tom Pollock (then head of Universal Pictures, which released *July*), 'enhanced' the trauma of the film by representing 'innocence' through the identity of an unblemished star: 'Tom Cruise is all America's all-American boy. The film's journey is more powerful when it is made by the maverick from *Top Gun*. It's not only Ron who goes through this wrenching story, it is Tom Cruise – our perception of Tom Cruise.'⁸¹ Much of *July* is thus fixated on not only Kovic's lost innocence but also the loss of his sexual agency (Cruise, of course, being a pin-up), including a scene where Kovic repeatedly shouts 'Penis!' in a drunken state to intimidate his God-fearing mother. Female characterisations in the film were ultimately stunted by these dramaturgical decisions; *July* is filmed principally through Kovic's eyes, where women are either childhood sweethearts of his 'lost innocence' or prostitutes whom he procures sexual experiences with as a paraplegic client. There is no Sally Hyde in *July*: women are represented as virgins, whores, or callous mothers. Through being sexually and

⁸⁰ Peter C. Rollins, 'The Vietnam War: Perceptions Through Literature, Film and Television', *American Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3 (1984), pp. 422-423.

⁸¹ Pollock quoted in Richard Corliss, 'Tom Terrific', *Time* (25 December 1989), p. 75.

emotionally unavailable, women are all but ‘written out’ of Kovic’s story despite the major emotional subtext erring toward the masculine inadequacy he feels as a paraplegic. When *July* finally represents Kovic’s politicisation and activities with Vietnam Veterans Against the War [VVAW] in its closing act, Kovic is safely ensconced in the company of men, although the final frames ultimately depict him as a lone star of the veterans’ movement, poised to address the televised Democratic National Convention of 1976.

Coming Home, for which Kovic had been extensively interviewed, functioned as an unofficial representation of his experiences before *July* was released in 1989.⁸² Restructuring the latter film’s narrative around solely one character’s experiences (rather than the triangular perspective of *Coming Home*) was achieved with Kovic’s direct involvement. He co-wrote the screenplay with Oliver Stone and endorsed Cruise’s performance using mythic tones by proposing to the *New York Times*: ‘I truly believe he actually becomes me.’⁸³ In chapter 3 discussing *Coming Home*, Fonda’s willingness to indebt her film to Kovic as an inspirational force is noted; she recounts sharing a platform with Kovic during her years as an anti-war activist and claims this experience became the spark for the film that followed.⁸⁴ A second wave Vietnam film purporting to be the ‘real’ Kovic story, *July* subverted the shared Fonda-Kovic affinity connoted through *Coming Home* by implicitly representing – and resenting – women as purveyors of emotional distance and sexual unavailability. Indeed, Kovic’s

⁸² A film version of *July* was originally scheduled for production in 1978, two years after the publication of Kovic’s memoirs, with William Friedkin as director, Oliver Stone as writer, and Al Pacino as the lead. See Robert Seidenberg, ‘To Hell and Back’ *American Film* (January 1990), p. 30.

⁸³ Kovic quoted in Paul Chutkow, ‘The Private War of Tom Cruise’, *New York Times* (17 December 1989), p. H29.

⁸⁴ The previous footnote in chapter 3 bears repeating here: Fonda had shared a platform with Kovic at an anti-war rally in Claremont, CA, in 1973, during which Kovic stated ‘I may have lost my body, but I’ve gained my mind.’ Fonda identifies this sentence as the inspiration for *Coming Home* in her autobiography. Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 344.

promotion of *July* suggested he desired a public platform, but not a shared one: 'I knew that a movie would really be able to reach people who would not pick up my book.'⁸⁵ While this indicated the danger of investing in a 'star-veteran' – precisely because of Cruise's soothing ability to walk away from the trauma of the war's aftermath – Fonda's associations with Vietnam drifted further from the screen, and, in turn, further from the reality of historical events.

Conclusion

The second coming of Hollywood's Vietnam during the late-1980s bestowed a complex legacy to American society. Lauded by the industry for representing the conflict afresh, a different kind of cultural casualty was created through refocusing on masculine issues. Fonda's case is extreme yet by plotting her experiences within studies of Vietnam revisionism and, indeed, the backlash against women in American society, the campaign of myth against her can be deciphered and rooted, if not necessarily rooted out altogether.

The very instance of a backlash against women denotes that significant gains had been made; for Fonda this process of achievement had been more scrutinised than most, given that her recuperative road from being branded a traitor led into the heart of Hollywood. Indeed, reportage of Fonda's success as a force in the industry also highlighted the standing of her contemporaries, suggesting women's power in Hollywood was to be celebrated. A 1986 cover feature of *Life* magazine, by then a

⁸⁵ Kovic quoted in Ari Goldman, 'Ron Kovic Today: Warrior at Peace' *New York Times* (17 December 1989), p. H29.

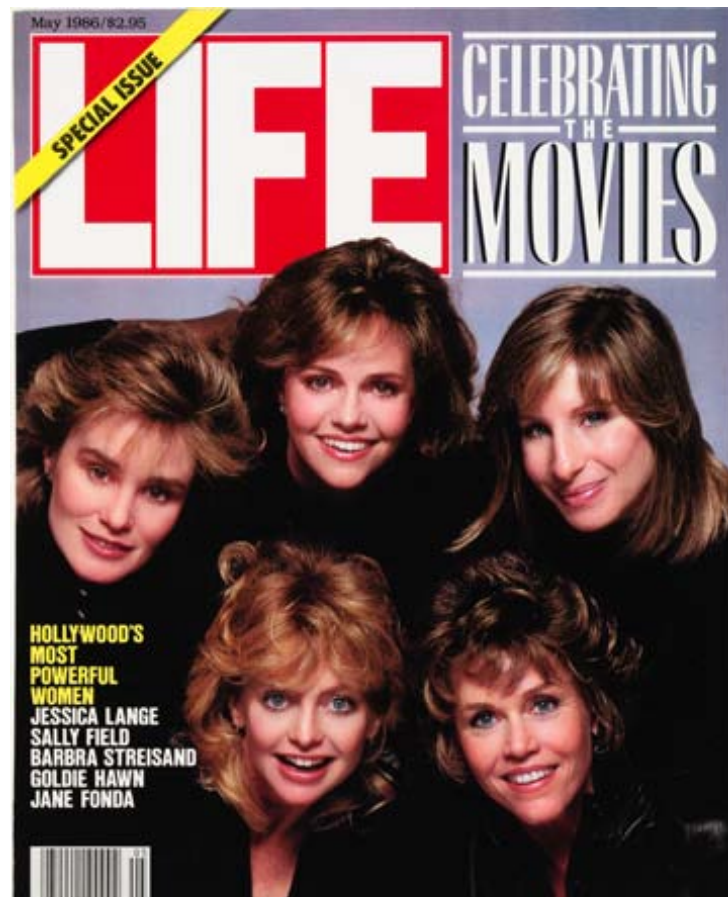


Figure 19. *Life* (May 1986). Fonda occupied a privileged position in Hollywood before the right-wing backlash against her.

monthly publication, assembled her amongst an elite of female stars, all of whom had cultivated power bases in Hollywood (fig. 19). The article identified that of the five actresses, Fonda had travelled the farthest. While Streisand, Field, Hawn, and Lange all proceeded to consolidate their successes of the 1980s, 1986 constituted the end of an era for Fonda; it was the year of *The Morning After* and *Platoon*, when cultural and political amnesia gave ‘Hanoi Jane’ new sustenance.

In 1988, Fonda made a televised apology to the nation and its veterans, appearing on Barbara Walters’ confessional platform, *20/20*. Having effectively

quelled the Waterbury protest, Fonda's nationwide address from the confines of the small screen enlarged the debate over her motives as an anti-war activist and even an American citizen.⁸⁶ Five months after the transmission of *20/20*, Fonda expressed second thoughts in a *Vanity Fair* interview over having done it at all: 'Her mistake, she believes, was choosing a format for the apology that she couldn't control.'⁸⁷ In a broader sense, Fonda's political identity was increasingly occupying a 'format' Fonda could not control as the 1980s gathered conservative pace. Reactionary forces dictated that Vietnam needed scapegoats and Fonda – the feminist career-woman wielding significant power in various American media – was their main symbol and target. Despite being portrayed as a grassroots campaign, the 'Hanoi Jane' myth had reached the heights of national politics alongside Waterbury becoming a household name. Republican assaults on their Democratic rivals had persisted as a favoured tactic of the GOP in recent years, reported the *Los Angeles Times* in 1990.⁸⁸ On the personal front, attacks were also forthcoming; Hayden and Fonda planned to split at the end of the 1980s and mutual threats reached media circulation as a result of their bitter divorce suit. 'Intimate' sources claimed Fonda planned to depict Hayden as a pot-smoking womaniser and he harboured threats to wreck her image as a pro-labour, anti-corporate liberal.⁸⁹ Although Fonda maintained a popular base at the close of the 1980s,⁹⁰ she was entering a new phase of image development as a contested figure of America's past and future. The gradual dissolution of IPC Films over the course of the 1980s connoted this volatile process: Fonda's commercial-political stardom had

⁸⁶ Fonda used her time in Waterbury to hold fundraisers for victims of Agent Orange, generating donations by posing with some four hundred fans individually in photographs for \$15 each. Nick Ravo, 'Jane Fonda Finds Peace in Her Time', *New York Times* (4 August 1988), pp. B1, B5.

⁸⁷ Rosenbaum, 'Dangerous Jane', p. 143.

⁸⁸ Ronald Brownstein, 'Name of Jane Fonda a Trusty GOP Weapon', *Los Angeles Times* (25 September 1990), JFCC/AMPAS.

⁸⁹ Aviva Sachs, 'Jane Fonda Enters a New Era', *McCall's* (September 1989), p. 33.

⁹⁰ According to a survey Fonda commissioned in 1987, two-thirds of Americans viewed her positively. Brownstein, 'Name of Jane Fonda a Trusty GOP Weapon', JFCC/AMPAS.

ruptured and these irreconcilable components had greater ideological value to America's right-wing society as contradictory symbols; indeed, the mythology surrounding Fonda's identity proved itself an illustrious force more powerful than the actual truth of that identity.

EPILOGUE

In 2005, Jane Fonda returned to Hollywood filmmaking after a sixteen year hiatus. Yet like her cinematic debut in 1960 and her previous return to the industry in 1977, the films marking these junctures were less remarkable than the publicity Fonda's emergence – or re-emergence – generated as an 'event' in and of itself. *Tall Story* (1960), *Fun with Dick and Jane* (1977), and *Monster-in-Law* (2005) were all comedic enterprises, with the latter film in particular bordering on self-deprecation.¹ Comedy has thereby proved a reliable genre in Fonda's career at critical points, and, in this context, a prelude to the overarching drama of Fonda's 'real life' unfolding through a media spectrum incorporating cinema. *Tall Story* was thus overshadowed by grander themes of dynasty and dissent, *People* magazine's declaration 'America Loves Her Again' followed *Dick and Jane*'s success, and *Monster-in-Law* provided the light accompaniment to *My Life So Far*, Fonda's 624-page autobiography laying open the drama of her existence in America's media glare.

The publication of *My Life So Far* in April 2005 benefitted from direct and indirect marketing techniques, including book signings, multimedia interviews, and cinematic retrospectives. This precipitated the most concentrated exposure Fonda had received since retiring from filmmaking in 1990. Indeed, these intervening years comprise intriguing components: Fonda's marriage (and divorce) to her third husband, the media tycoon Ted Turner; the continuation of her line of workout/lifestyle videos; her discovery of a spiritual calling as a born-again Christian. This pattern of events

¹ In *Monster-in-Law*, Fonda's character of Viola Fields is a high powered media star deposed by her superiors due to her advancing years. Early in the film Viola physically attacks her more nubile would-be replacement on-air and spends the rest of the narrative terrorising her son's fiancée (Jennifer Lopez) because she fears abandonment.

follows an ostensibly paradoxical trajectory insofar as Fonda's subscription to mainstream values (marriage, entrepreneurship, religion) coincided with a marked decline in her media coverage; the implication arises that Fonda's identity and stardom have ultimately derived significance through embodying rebellion or negotiating recuperative possibilities ensuing from such rebellion. *My Life So Far* thus represented a milestone by pooling these rebellious and recuperative elements into a continuous, coherent narrative – Fonda's 'authorship' of her life promised to reveal how and why she rebelled from a mainstream existence whilst concurrently seeking to instil rebellion – or 'change' – within the mainstream consciousness. As an autobiography succeeding a sizable body of biographical interest throughout her career, Fonda's contribution was ostensibly an intervention, the 'final word' on various matters pertaining to her stardom and films. Yet given its conceptual and thematic strategies, *My Life So Far* should be considered as much an overture to the mainstream as a straightforward confessional.

Marketing of Fonda's autobiography unified around the confessional elements of its content, including a round of appearances on talk shows and lifestyle programmes. Moreover, this process is ongoing, as exemplified by the American website of Amazon.com, where the listing of *My Life So Far* features a signed letter from Fonda addressed 'Dear Amazon Customer'. Within the letter she states:

I decided to write [*My Life So Far*] because I felt that if I could be brave enough and go deep enough, that my story would be helpful to other people. I wanted to write my life in such a way that in reading about *my* journey, the

reader would continually put the book down and reflect on their own life and relationships [original emphasis].²

Evidently Fonda continues to seek a meaningful connection with everyday Americans and her autobiography highlights her strategies informing this quest. Writing as an actress, mother, wife of three successive husbands, and above all, a star's daughter, Fonda's humanising self-portrait commences with her most basic connection to ordinary people; she, like us, was once a child and has spent her life seeking growth and change. In this, Fonda is at once ordinary and extraordinary, an heir to dynastic stardom yet 'privately' a vulnerable daughter. This is a feature that structures many elements of her autobiography with the inevitable effect of obscuring others.

Henry Fonda looms large in *My Life So Far* through more than just its content. The publication year marks the centenary of his birth and Fonda's choice to title her work *My Life So Far* is simultaneously reverent and defiant, given that Henry's life story, published in 1981, adopted the shorter title *Fonda: My Life*. *My Life* was published to coincide with the release of *On Golden Pond*; similarly, *My Life So Far* dedicates a sole chapter to *On Golden Pond*, along with other chapters titled 'Barbarella' and 'Klute'. Fonda's choice to dedicate chapters to some films but not others is consonant with the media's accounts of her changing identity. In choosing *On Golden Pond* as a marker, Fonda treats this biographical spectacle as the apex of its period and thus her IPC years.

² http://www.amazon.com/My-Life-Far-Jane-Fonda/dp/0375507108/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1283448571&sr=8-2. Accessed 1 September 2010.

My Life So Far, in this and many respects, reveals the master narrative of IPC. Fonda's appeal to Amazon customers, discussed above, hopes they will experience her story and be moved to change their own lives. Whereas the narratives of *Coming Home*, *The China Syndrome* and others depicted characters' journeys from political innocence to political enlightenment, *My Life So Far* is the ultimate drama of Fonda's 'life story'. Adopting a structure Fonda labels as three 'acts', her autobiography follows a dramaturgy of change in the spirit of her IPC projects. Fonda's 'Act One: Gathering', leads up to the political events of 1968 and 'Act Two: Seeking', commences with Fonda's politicisation. 'Act Three: Beginning', stands apart as it charts Fonda's single life after turning 60, and, indeed, the conception of her memoirs. Given that Fonda's life has often provided source material for her stardom, and she, in turn, has used her stardom to reach out to the mainstream, the original objectives and strategies of IPC Films continue to resonate.

As an overture to the mainstream, *My Life So Far* obscures the full extent of Fonda's ambitions and achievements in relation to IPC. Her autobiography is less a portrait of power than an ode to embracing the forces of change. This thesis thus provides a closer analysis of Fonda's political and commercial influence both onscreen and off. Regarding *Julia*, for example, Fonda recounts coveting the 'multidimensional, dramatic role' of Lillian Hellman without mentioning the political kudos of this left-wing luminary. Likewise, references to 'the great director', Fred Zinnemann, and her 'professional idol', Vanessa Redgrave, gloss over the film's complex production history which, through the published and unpublished primary

sources analysed in chapter 2, reveals *Julia*'s pivotal function as a prototype of Fonda's politicised IPC narratives.³

In situating the strategic dimensions of IPC, Fonda demarcates her work from that of her brother's, especially *Easy Rider* (1969), which she considers exemplary of 'the revolutionary changes that were rocking American filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s'.⁴ Rather, Fonda underlines her inspiration using a quote by the English playwright David Hare, claiming "'The best place to be radical is at the center'".⁵ This allusion is concise, but nonetheless revealing: by citing the strategies of a playwright (as opposed to a filmmaker, theorist, or even an activist), Fonda cloaks the IPC project in the mantle of political art rather than activism, while primary sources analysed in this thesis reveal the latter factor to be the original and ascendant contemporaneous motive. Accordingly, Fonda's discussion of *The China Syndrome* – a major success of her production company – is abbreviated by neglecting to elaborate on the film's impact and legacy. On the one hand, Fonda is candid when recounting the politicised conception of *The China Syndrome*, which she claims 'dovetailed perfectly with what the Campaign for Economic Democracy was all about: blowing the whistle on large corporations that were willing to risk the public's welfare to protect their profits'.⁶ Yet on the political implications of the film's coincidence with events at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania, she is relatively circumspect, focusing instead on its sensational qualities: 'It was beyond belief, the most shocking synchronicity between real-life catastrophe and movie fiction ever to have occurred. [...] People went to see [*The China Syndrome*] to understand what

³ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, p. 364.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

happened in Pennsylvania.’⁷ Fonda’s reticence over exploring the film’s wider political impact is curious; *The China Syndrome* has nevertheless remained associated with the crisis it anticipated in scholarly circles, described by historian J. Samuel Walker as revealing ‘the acrimonious national controversy over nuclear power’.⁸

In a wider context, the truncated discussion of *The China Syndrome* indicates how *My Life So Far* does not treat IPC Films as a landmark enterprise of Fonda’s career, despite its output affording her unprecedented creative control and commercial success. The films *Nine to Five* and *Rollover*, for example, are contextualised in the political matrix of this thesis, whereas Fonda’s discussion of each varies in density and intent, in line with the popular interests of her target readership. It is little wonder, therefore, that of the films Fonda produced through IPC, *Coming Home* and *On Golden Pond* feature most heavily in *My Life So Far*. Each movie bookends IPC’s output and, moreover, each symbolises the extremes of her identity in a popular context: *Coming Home* dramatises Fonda’s growth of a political consciousness in response to Vietnam, and *On Golden Pond* is a reconciliatory melodrama feeding the media’s fascination with the Fonda dynasty. The interplay of these two motifs encapsulates the ideological contradiction of her stardom at its commercial height. Specifically, Fonda’s image has never fully divorced from the Vietnam War nor has she necessarily sought to sever these links; indeed, the passages describing her trip to North Vietnam in *My Life So Far* are written in the present tense deliberately. While choosing to write in this fashion indicates an authorial power – Fonda narrates her actions in Vietnam using the decree of ‘I am’ rather than ‘I was’ – the implication also arises that her anti-war activism remains unresolved, an ideological symptom of the

⁷ Ibid., p. 408.

⁸ Walker, *Three Mile Island*, p. 3.

‘present tense’ mindset that many Americans inhabit when holding her actions to everlasting account. In historical context, therefore, IPC Films, and its cinematic journey from Vietnam to *On Golden Pond* provided a window – albeit ephemeral – for Fonda’s stardom and identity to function as a healing rather than divisive force for the national consciousness.

This thesis has explored concepts of individual agency where it has otherwise been constrained by theoretical shorthand – Fonda as a historical figure as well as a historical symbol; Fonda as a producer in Hollywood, as well as a cinematic star image. Yet constructing this analysis of Fonda’s stardom and identity is also a complex task when she has often abdicated the power of her individual agency. *My Life So Far* encapsulates this tendency with the following statement, expressed in a chapter charting her return to Hollywood cinema in 1977 and her husband’s unsuccessful race for the Senate: ‘A woman can be powerful professionally, socially, and financially, but it is what goes on behind the closed doors of her most intimate relationship and within her own heart that tells the story.’⁹ Fonda’s emphasis on interiority, the private realm ‘behind closed doors’ is a seductive trope of autobiographical writing but does not account for the manifold sources available to historians of visual culture. Specifically, two covers of *People* magazine from 1975 and 1982 respectively, which bracket her IPC period, exemplify the trajectory toward ‘political domesticity’ that Fonda implies above (fig. 20):

⁹ Fonda, *My Life So Far*, pp. 368, 370.



Figure 20. *People* covers before and after IPC Films (23 June 1975 and 24 May 1982).

Contrasting in compositional style, tableau, dress and physicality, the 1982 cover indicates the conventional acceptability of Fonda's identity amidst a conservative ideological climate: in the cover portrait Hayden seemingly 'constrains' Fonda, rather than be overshadowed by her, as indeed he is on the 1975 cover. The abdication of Fonda's power in this context is not hidden but manifests explicitly as a duty bound 'first lady'. Conversely, 'behind closed doors' of Hollywood studios are precisely where Fonda held court through shaping the development of her films and deciding how to present her image in the nation's media. These shifting motives and manifestations of Fonda's stardom (both as an architect and detractor of her own power) reveal the political price of mainstream success.

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The format for entries is as follows:

Title: year; production company; *prod*–producer; *dir*–director; *sc*–screenplay, *st*–story/scenario; principal cast; running time (in minutes).

Barbarella: 1968; Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica, Marianne Productions; *prod*–Dino de Laurentiis; *dir*–Roger Vadim; *sc*–Terry Southern, Roger Vadim; *cast*: Jane Fonda, John Phillip Law, Anita Pallenberg, Milo O’Shea, Marcel Marceau; 98 mins.

The China Syndrome: 1979; IPC Films; *prod*–Michael Douglas, Bruce Gilbert, James Nelson; *dir*–James Bridges ; *sc*–Mike Gray, T.S. Cook, James Bridges; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Jack Lemmon, Michael Douglas, Scott Brady, James Hampton, Peter Donat, Wilfred Brimley; 122 mins.

Comes a Horseman: 1978; Chartoff-Winkler Productions; *prod*–Ronnie Caan, Robert Chartoff, Gene Kirkwood, Dan Paulson, Irwin Winkler; *dir*–Alan J. Pakula; *sc*–Dennis Lynton Clark; *cast*: James Caan, Jane Fonda, Jason Robards, George Grizzard, Richard Farnsworth; 118 mins.

Coming Home: 1978; Jerome Hellman Productions, IPC Films (as Jayne Productions Inc.); *prod*–Bruce Gilbert, Jerome Hellman; *dir*–Hal Ashby ; *sc*–Robert C. Jones, Waldo Salt, *st*–Nancy Dowd; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Jon Voight, Bruce Dern, Penelope Milford, Robert Carradine, Robert Ginty; 127 mins.

Fun with Dick and Jane: 1977; Columbia Pictures Corporation; *prod*–Peter Bart, Max Pavelsky, Marion Segal; *dir*–Ted Kotcheff ; *sc*–David Giler, Jerry Belson, Mordecai Richler, *st*–Gerald Gaiser; *cast*: George Segal, Jane Fonda, Ed McMahon, Richard Gautier, Allan Miller; 95 mins.

Julia: 1977; Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation; *prod*–Julien Derode, Tom Pevsner, Richard Roth; *dir*–Fred Zinnemann ; *sc*–Alvin Sargent; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Vanessa Redgrave, Jason Robards, Maximilian Schell, Hal Holbrook, Rosemary Murphy, Meryl Streep; 117 mins.

Klute: 1971; Gus Productions, Warner Bros. Pictures; *prod*–C. Kenneth Deland, David Lange, Alan J. Pakula; *dir*–Alan J. Pakula ; *sc*–Andy Lewis, Dave Lewis; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Charles Cioffi, Roy Scheider, Dorothy Tristan, Rita Gam; 114 mins

The Morning After: 1986; American Filmworks, Lorimar Productions; *prod*–Lois Bonfiglio, Bruce Gilbert, Wolfgang Glattes, Faye Schwab; *dir*–Sidney Lumet ; *sc*–James Hicks; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Jeff Bridges, Raul Julia, Diane Salinger, Richard Foronjy, Geoffrey Scott; 103 mins.

Nine to Five: 1980; IPC Films, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation; *prod*–Bruce Gilbert; *dir*–Colin Higgins ; *sc*–Colin Higgins and Patricia Resnick; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, Dolly Parton, Dabney Coleman, Sterling Hayden, Elizabeth Wilson; 110 mins.

On Golden Pond: 1981; IPC Films, Incorporated Television Company (ITC), Universal Pictures; *prod*–Bruce Gilbert; *dir*–Mark Rydell ; *sc*–Ernest Thompson; *cast*: Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda, Jane Fonda, Doug McKeon, Dabney Coleman; 109 mins.

Rollover: 1981; IPC Films; *prod*–Bruce Gilbert, Wendi Laxarr; *dir*–Alan J. Pakula; *sc*–David Shaber, *st*–Howard Kohn, David Shaber, David Weir; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Kris Kristofferson, Hume Cronyn, Josef Sommer, Bob Gunton; 116 mins.

Tout Va Bien: 1972; Anouchka Films, Vieco Films, Empiore Films; *prod*–Jean-Pierre Rassam; *dir/sc*–Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin; *cast*: Yves Montand, Jane Fonda, Vittorio Caprioli; 95 mins.

They Shoot Horses, Don't They?: 1969; Palomar Pictures; *prod*–Robert Chartoff, Johnny Green, Theodore B. Sills, Irwin Winkler; *dir*–Sydney Pollack ; *sc*–James Poe, Robert E. Thompson; *cast*: Jane Fonda, Michael Sarrazin, Susannah York, Gig Young, Red Buttons, Bonnie Bedelia; 129 mins.